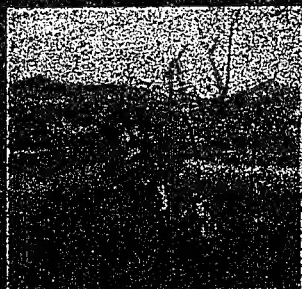




PRAIRIE, SNOW  
AND SEA.  
LAWRENCE MOTT





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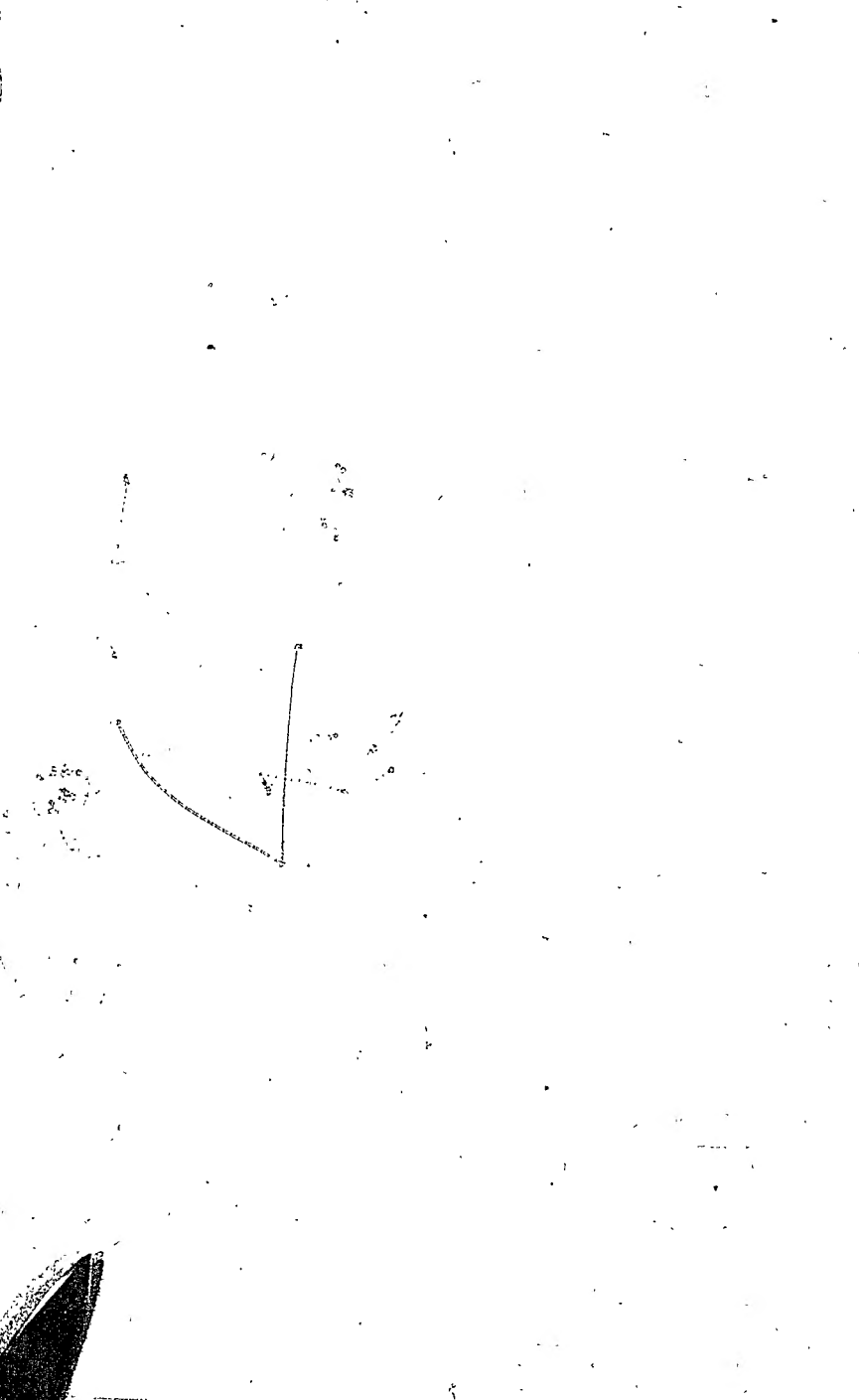
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PRAIRIE, SNOW, AND SEA

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# PRAIRIE, SNOW AND SEA

BY LAWRENCE MOTT

AUTHOR OF

"JULES OF THE GREAT HEART," "THE WHITE DARKNESS,"  
"TO THE CREDIT OF THE SEA"

TORONTO  
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1910

MOTT, L.

To C. M.

In the lonely hour of gloaming  
When the shadows softly rest  
On plain and vale and snow-deep mountain,  
And the hawk has gone to nest.  
When the owl—so distant calling,  
Listens, eager for its mate,  
And the marsh-frog, boldly answ'ring,  
Pipes, "Too late ! too late ! too late !"

Then read, and hark back yonder ;  
Hear the wild geese' plaintive cry !  
Winging homeward—faster, faster—  
A tiny wedge across the sky.  
And the rustling of the alders,  
Whispering to the cool night-wind,  
Will loose the memories far behind us ;—  
Would that they were *not* behind.

L. M.





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# PRAIRIE, SNOW, AND SEA

## THE LIE

FAR out on the undulating, seared prairie a solitary horseman sat moodily in his saddle, gnawing listlessly at the end of his quirt. His pony's head drooped in an attitude of dejection.

"My God, will it *ever* rain?"

Prairie Ralph looked up at the sky as he muttered,

One vast smothering glare of heat it seemed, and the sun was as a huge coppery ball whose merciless rays sifted through the atmosphere, blasting the very ground.

Cattle everywhere, some staggering in the last agonies of death by thirst, some lowing pitifully, and numberless others fallen in grotesque heaps, above which swarms of vultures and buzzards circled slowly, their ceaseless evolutions dizzying the eye.

They knew the feast that awaited them, but they feared the grim figure on the arroyo-top.

"My God!" he whispered again, pulling the sombrero further over his face.

On and on and on, fading away as a heaving sea fades at the horizon, the interminable brown and

ugly grey of the baked soil vanished mysteriously, apparently blending itself with the heavens.

Nothing moving save the tortured beasts—not a sound but that of their suffering. As though in mockery of it all, the pebbles of the arroyo bed glistened and shone where the water that should be there had polished their surfaces.

"There'll be none left in two days more, unless——" He stopped; sobs, tearless sobs, shook his frame. "What agony!" he burst out; "I'd sell my soul, I'd lie, steal, *kill*, to stop this!"

The passion in his voice roused the pony. It looked at him and whinnied very softly.

"Dick, old man, I believe you know too. Let's go home."

Snaffle lying loose, the pony turned apathetically to the west'ard, and broke into a weak lope. Through what was left of a magnificent herd it kept on, the man almost dreamily counting the dead and dying on his right side.

"Three hundred, one—two—five—eight—nine—eight. . . . Guess I must be going the same road! Can't even count!"

Sweat poured from him, spotting the silver-mounted horn of his deep saddle, soaking into the lariat that was coiled over it.

Slower and slower became the lope, then slackened to a walk.

Prairie Ralph dismounted, uncorked his water-bottle, then, thumb over its neck, he shook it. The small amount of liquid gurgled. The pony heard, and rubbed its muzzle gently on the man's sleeve.

Craving water, whose very sound made the craving

worse, Prairie Ralph hesitated. The pony shyly held up its off fore-foot.

"*She* taught you that, Dick; the water is yours!"

Inserting the neck of the bottle between the teeth, he poured slowly, the pony rigid with gratification.

"There, old man: that's all—every drop—and forty miles to go!"

Into the west they went, facing the killing heat; past gophers' villages—but the cheery little barks and scamperings were stilled, and lithe brown bodies lay motionless about the burrows.

At last, brain scorched in his skull, reeling in his saddle, Prairie Ralph dropped to the ground before a long low building—his "squatter" home.

The sun had long since gone, but its heat radiated suffocatingly from the ground.

Glimmering, dancing to his eyes, the stars shone with metallic ferocity; even *their* light seemed hot. Not a cloud, not a breeze, not a sound.

He wearily uncinched, dragged the bridle from Dick, and turned him loose.

"There's nothing, old man—nothing but death now—unless——"

Dragging one foot after the other, he crawled up the short steps. "Elsie?"

Silence.

"*Elsie?*"

The *b-z-z-z-z* of green-bottle flies answered him.

He struck a match.

Her long fair hair tumbled about her face and shoulders, the girl he loved, his wife, lay stretched on the wide bunk in the corner, one arm hanging limply over the edge.

He shook her gently, half afraid of the result.

She opened her eyes. "Any chance—chance—of——?" she whispered.

"None!" he answered, and stuffed the end of his red neckerchief in his mouth to choke back strangling sobs.

With that great unfathomable love inherent in woman, she understood his pain; forgetting her own suffering, she sat up.

"There's a glass—of—of—water in the chest, Boy," she faltered. "I saved it for you."

He sprang at her roughly. "When did you drink last? I've been gone two days! Answer me!"

"Don't, Ralph: you hurt—please don't."

"Answer me!"

She could not lie to him. "Yest—yesterday."

One bound, and he was at the chest, had the glass of precious water in his hand, then back by her side. "Drink!"

"Oh, Ralph, as you love me: you need it more than I do; *please*—oh, my God!"

He had seized her, forced her lips apart and poured the water down.

The ecstasy of satisfied Nature was too great. She fainted, a tiny smile dimpling the haggard cheeks.

He dashed the glass to the floor; its crash and tinkling breaking the stillness weirdly.

He stared round the neat interior with minute care. The flour-barrel was there, full; bacon hung from the rafters, uncut; the bags of potatoes and onions were in place, practically untouched; coffee and tea urns where they belonged; all neat and clean. And by the door the shining water-pails, glistening strangely—empty.

He flung himself on the floor. "And now then? What's next?"

Water! water!

Every sinew, each nerve, his whole being was being torn apart, so it seemed to him, by the awful longing. His only peace—minute enough—was to hear *her* breathing, softly and regularly.

"I can't last, but she may! Oh, mercy, God, *mercy!*" He screamed the last word; she did not move.

Slowly at first, then faster and faster, his mind wandered. He had hallucinations that he was home in England again, 'mid the Kentish hills; he *heard* water running, babbling over moss-covered rock, and *saw* its foam as it tumbled down into deep sparkling pools. Yes, and he could bathe his hands in it . . . instead he convulsively opened and shut them on the hard hot boards.

The hours passed on. Sometimes he was unconscious, sometimes abnormally alert.

During one of these sane moments he rose suddenly as the sound of hoof-beats came thudding over the prairie. A horse and rider, silhouetted against the dawn, appeared.

"Hide me, Ralph! They're after me!" Bleeding from a wound in his shoulder and a deep gash over his eye, Tom Watts lurched in.

Senses keen, Ralph stared at him: "Who's after you? What is it?"

"Shot—shot Alf Hayman day before—before yesterday. He had plenty of—of water from—his—his damned well, and my—my cattle, my wife an' kid are dy—dying. The devil laughed at—at me an'

I kil—killed him! The Mounteds<sup>1</sup> are close—hellish close—be—behind. Hide me!”

A stern look came over Prairie Ralph's face; the other saw it, and crawled to him.

“I know you're trus—trusted by th' Police, Ralph, 'cause ye've never—never lied to 'em nor to nob—ody; but Ralph, I'm hit hard, an' my wife's dyin', Ralph—*dyin'*! What's to become of—of—of her if they get me?”

Silence.

Then he began again; the same tense expression on Prairie Ralph's face. “God'll reward ye, Ralph—if there *be* a God; an' if there ain't, well—well, *some*—*body* will lift—a hand fer ye when ye needs it—it most. I'm all in, Ralph, an' done!”

Watts sagged to the floor in a heap.

Prairie Ralph looked with that same curious tensivity out into the growing blazing light.

Not a cloud anywhere; nothing but the certain forecast of another murdering day.

And as he stared his own words came back to him of the day before: “I'd lie, steal, *kill*, to stop this.”

Something moving yonder? Yes! one, two, four, five! The *Police*! With a quick motion he picked Watts up, carried him to the bunk and put him beyond the girl.

She wakened. “What is——?”

“Quiet, Elsie: be asleep; don't wake *whatever* you hear!”

Trusting implicitly, she closed her eyes. He sat down on the sill.

Nearer and nearer came the moving figures till

<sup>1</sup> R.N.W.M. Police.

they drew up before him. "Hello, Ralph! *Hell*, isn't it?" Corporal Dickson said, adding sympathetically: "Passed through your cattle last night; they're holding out better'n most, but dying fast. Got any water?"

Ralph shook his head.

"Here, Jack, fetch up your jug. Thought you'd be shy, so I brought along a bit for you!"

With the ravening of an animal, Prairie Ralph seized the vessel, rushed into the big room and poured again down his wife's throat, drinking himself afterwards.

The unspeakable bliss weakened every fibre of his body. There was a bit left.

"Dick!" he whistled through parched lips.

The pony stumbled forward, and he gave it the rest, dropping the jug afterward.

The police were sorry for him. They knew what the awful drought meant. Often when on patrol they had stopped overnight at his home, and he had told them of his struggle to make the cattle pay back his all that he had invested. This was to have been the banner year, and now——!

"It don't seem right, Ralph, that ye should be hit so hard. Ye've always done right and gone straight; damn me if it ain't a hell of a shame!"

Prairie Ralph pulled himself together by an effort as he saw the figure beyond the girl on the bunk move.

"What brings you boys into this furnace?"

The Corporal sighed, lighting his pipe. "Nasty job, Ralph. Tom Watts killed Alf Hayman two days ago; deliberately shot him. Not that I'm

blamin' Tom Watts, because Hayman's selfish 'bout his water; but law's law, an' orders come from the Commissioner yesterday to 'get him.' *You* know what *that* means, Ralph."

The other nodded, glancing involuntarily at the bunk.

One of the police followed his look. "The missus bad, too?"

Real tears came to the ranchman's eyes; he did not answer.

Out of sympathy no one spoke. The Corporal broke the silence with an awkward cough.

"Well, well, Ralph, it *must* rain soon; think of that, man. By the way, ye haven't seen anythin' movin' in the shape of—of——?"

"No." Ralph lied doggedly for the first time in his life. "I haven't seen him."

"We got his track in what's left of the mud at Rickford's Gulch, an' he was headin' this way, so I thought we'd drop across an' bring ye the water at the same time. Most likely Tom'll head it for th' American Line, but he started off wounded by Bentley, who's been shifted to the Lower Run, an' he had no water, so we'll find him——" he paused, then added slowly, "somewheres; but I guess he'll have 'cashed in.' His poor wife, too."

The far figure on the bed stirred. "Water! Water!"

The Corporal started as Ralph jerked the water-bottle free.

"Why, that sounds like——"

"Here, Bill, here you are, and plenty of it."

As the wounded man drank, Prairie Ralph turned his head. "New man I took on. Lot of use he is now! Comes from Calgary way."

"Oh-h-h."

The ranchman's eyes never wavered under the Corporal's keen stare.

"I see," the latter said distinctly; then, "Come on, men; we'll be movin' on."

As they filed out with quiet good-byes and "better luck," so as not to disturb the girl, Ralph watched dully.

The Corporal reached out his brown wiry hand and whispered, "Ralph, you're *white*! God give you rain!"

When the sound of their horses' feet had died away, and the bobbing figures had vanished blurredly in the heat-waves, a roaring burst in Ralph's ears; everything whirled round him, and he fell a senseless mass.

The girl opened her eyes. Seeing him on the floor, she crawled to him.

"Ralph! *Ralph!*"

She too fainted again.

The afternoon wore on, all three in the stifling interior like so many corpses.

At sunset a terrifying change came over the brilliant heavens. At first, as an ink line on the horizon, a bank of cloud appeared. It rushed forward, darkening everything, blotting out the western skies; and then, with a vicious *hiss-s-s* and long-drawn wail of wind, the rain came, while peal upon peal of gigantic thunder rolled and volleyed and echoed, shaking the low building. Ugly shafts and

jagged lines of lightning darted everywhere, and water came in solid sheets. It trickled through the sun-warped shingles, and a stream fell on Ralph's face.

He sat up. His eyes became terror-stricken. "Oh, my God! not madness. Let me die, but not *madness!*"

Still the stream poured on him. Yes, it was wet —WET! He screamed aloud now.

"Elsie!" Panting, he dragged her outside, and stretched her flat, face upwards.

"Tom! Come, man! Rain! RAIN!" Heedless of the other's wounds and his own weakness, he got him too out into the fearful downpour. Then every bucket, pail, cup, saucer, that he could find in his delirious joy he put out.

"Elsie, girl, can you feel it?"

"Yes, Boy: thank God! thank God!"

"Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

He told her Tom's story, and how he had lied.

She was silent for a moment. "This must be the answer, Boy," was all she said.

Watts crooked himself on his good arm. "I said that *Somebody* would hold out a helpin' hand, didn't I, Ralph? He's gone an' done it."

The three sat there, Elsie's head on the big ranchman's shoulder, while the water soaked into their bodies and the scorched blood in their veins cooled.

"Thank God!" the girl whispered peacefully; then she added, "Do you think Dickson knew?"

He did not answer.

And still it rained.

## A MAN

"YES, Dickson, everything looks in excellent condition."

Inspector Gibbs of the R.N.W.M. Police leaned back, closing the lonely post's report and account-books.

The Corporal saluted. "Thank you, sir."

"And, by the way, we got Tom Watts at last!"

Not a muscle of the Corporal's face changed.

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes; just outside of Edmonton. Burke found him delirious with drink and fever. He's in the hospital there." Silence while the Inspector drummed unconsciously with his fingers. "Sad case that," he murmured; "and Watts repeats over and over, 'I told you somebody would lift a hand for ye, and he's gone and done it.' Then he wanders off about rain and a girl, or something of the sort."

"He was struck heavy by the big drought, sir," Constable Elkins said.

"Aye, that's probably it; but how he got by all our posts, wounded as he was, is more than I know. However, I shall be up there in ten days. He may be able to say who sheltered him. *That* sort of

thing must be stopped among the 'squatters.' Won't do—won't do at all."

He belted his side-arms as the three constables, who acted as escort, led the horses from stable.

"Good luck, Dickson. I shall report favourably on Rough Ledge Post."

The Corporal watched them out of sight in the cooling shadows of Ledge Mountain, over which the autumn sun fell slowly, and whose reflections were as purple mists and grey vapour on the barren upper sides. The evening star twinkled brightly, already high in the afterglow of many delicate hues, and a tiny breeze stole up the ravine bed, carrying with it the freshness of the gurgling stream that wound its way to the Red River beyond.

"Thinkin' on promotion, Terry!"

"Old" Constable Elkins filled his pipe with a chuckle.

To him there clung a history. Not only had he been in the Force longer than any others, but hard luck and escaped prisoners had steadily balked his advancement in the Service. Naturally he was embittered, but would not give it up.

Dickson methodically put the books away and began cleaning his revolvers.

"Mighty fine woman that Prairie Ralph's wife!" Elkins said, watching his superior.

The Corporal polished on.

"D'ye mind the day we was after Watts and stopped there?"

"What of it?"

"D'ye mind the feller that was t'other side of her on th' bunk?" persisted the grizzly old soldier.

"The man Ralph called Bill? Yes; well?"

"'Well' or not, as ye choose, Terry, but *that* was Watts!"

Dickson looked up quickly. His face was pale.

"You're crazy, Ned! Ralph's never been known to lie or to hinder us; and I'm sure *my* record's clean enough."

Elkins squinted through the open doorway.

"Yes, Corp'ral, true; but women's scurce out in th' wilderness, an' Ralph's only brought her out four months." He spoke very slowly.

"What in thunderation are you driving at, man?" Dickson stood up.

The Constable smoked on in silence. Suddenly a tense look came over his features. He drew from an inside pocket, carefully wrapped up, a spur with a broken strap, and blood-stains all over it.

"I found that jest outside Prairie Ralph's shack that day. Now, Prairie don't wear no spurs—never did. Tom Watts *do*. All I gotter find is th' mate. D'ye get me, Terry?"

"Oh, shucks! anybody might have lost it."

"True agin, Terry; but ye'll mind that there warn't a thunderin' cav'lry parade goin' on over them hotter-'n-hell's-fire prairies *them* days!"

Stillness in the roomy cabin. Every now and then the low neighing of the horses came softly, or their muffled stamping.

The Corporal forced himself to speak: "What are you going to do about it?"

The other looked hard at him: "Find the mate, tell the story t' Headquarters, *an' get ye broke, damn ye!*"

A blow would not have surprised Dickson as did these words, venomously hissed rather than spoken.

He and Elkins had held Rock Ledge Post for six months together without a jarring word.

"Oh, ye thought old Ned 'ud furgit how *ye* got yer prom'tion fer takin' Black Andy when *I* told ye where he wuz hidin' up, didn't ye? Here's where I git back at ye!"

Re-wrapping the spur, he stalked out to feed and water the horses.

The Corporal passed a shaking hand over his eyes. "Great heavens! Here's the end of *my* rope! And it's true!"

He muttered on; then—"I couldn't take the poor devil there and show up Ralph, too. However," with a deep sigh, "Tom's wife and youngster are safe; he had time to do that. Why, why did he get drunk?"

He racked his brain for a solution. His position was this: If Elkins could prove that the mate to the spur he had found belonged to Watts, and on top of that gave evidence that Prairie Ralph had sheltered a murderer and deceived the police, stating furthermore that Corporal Dickson was a great friend of the ranchman—and his wife, the result would be twofold. First, Dickson would get one year's hard labour, and the end of his career; secondly, Prairie Ralph would be fined one thousand dollars, besides being "put down" on the Police Black Book as "suspicious."

Slowly, very gradually, the evening tints of the skies faded until they merged from faint green-yellow at the west to a deep dark-blue in the

east, that was pin-pointed by myriads of stars. More and more appeared, until the heavens were as one vast screen, through which countless bright eyes glistened mysteriously. From below him Dickson heard the quiet chattering of tumbling ripples, and out yonder across the ravine, where it welded itself to the curved prairie, gophers yelped, the shrill sounds modulated by distance.

Still the Constable did not return from the stables. Suddenly the Corporal made up his mind.

"Either I've got to get the spur away from him, or I must ride to Edmonton and warn Tom."

He felt relieved at having come to a resolution.

At supper neither spoke. Elkins' grim self-satisfaction was very apparent, and the younger man deemed caution the wiser method.

When the Constable had cleared away, he lighted his pipe again, and puffed a few times. "Terry?"

The other did not answer.

Elkins laughed. "Thought I might's well tell ye that I've buried the spur in case"—he stopped, then drawled on—"in—case ye might try to get hold of it!"

The raucous chuckle that followed set the Corporal on edge. He took one stride and towered over his companion.

"Look here, Elkins, I've had quite enough of this nonsense, and——"

"Ye haven't begun yet!" the other growled.

"And"—the Corporal continued quietly—"you will saddle up and ride to Widow M'Vickers, on the left branch of Muddy Slough, ten miles up. She complains of her men selling unbranded calves."

"Alright; I'll start early. Good-n——"

"You will saddle *now*!"

"The devil I will!" Elkins leaned back comfortably. "The devil I will!" he said again.

Without a word Dickson pulled down his report-book, opened it.

"Twenty-fifth October. Constable E. Elkins refu——"

"What ye doin'?" the other shouted.

"Putting you down for insubordination to your superior officer, and refusal of duty."

The pen touched the paper again.

"Damn ye!"

Wild with rage, the Constable got into his riding-clothes, and belted his weapons. In the doorway he turned ironically.

"Ye needn't look for th' spur! I got it *on me*!"

He tapped his chest, and a metallic rattling came.

"Get on—get on; and be back here by *noon*!"

"Maybe I will, an' maybe——!"

He was gone.

The Corporal heard him swearing at his horse as he cinched; then, with a defiant whoop and clatter of carbine, Elkins vanished into the night.

*Plud-a-plud—plud-a-plud!*

Fainter and fainter came the sounds; then the noise of shod hoofs crossing the ford, clinking on the stones—and silence.

"It's nine o'clock. If I go now I'll have all I need of a head-start," the Corporal mused. "And I'll go by Ralph's to warn him."

In half an hour he was in the saddle and away, going west.

The cabin stood alone, a black shape in the darkness, while coyotes barked and foxes scurried noiselessly along the ravine sides.

A figure stole out of the shadows then, advancing carefully, listening. It peered into the stable door.

"Started, by George!"

Elkins cursed and stamped. "I might 'a' *known* it!"

He led his brute from a scrub thicket, mounted and galloped on—also to the west.

The Corporal eased his horse on the rises, but kept him loping on the slight descents and flat land. The night-hours sped as the miles passed under him. At dawn he could see the smoke of Prairie Ralph's shack ahead, and as he topped the last arroyo something caused him to look back. He instantly saw a horseman coming fast behind, and he guessed at once.

"The devil!" he whispered, touching his horse with spur.

When he reached the long building, Elkins was coming over the arroyo.

"What is it, Terry? 'Morning to you!"

"Quick, Ralph! Trouble! Elkins knows, and can prove that your 'Bill' was Tom Watts, and is going to make a charge against you and me."

Hurrying through the story, watching Elkins coming, Dickson told enough to put the ranchman on his guard.

"Thought ye'd steal a little trip on th' old man, did ye? Umph, I guess *not*!" The Constable threw himself from his sweating, labouring horse. "Guess I'll go with ye from here on!" He entered the house roughly. "Give us a snack, Missus Ralph!"

The girl, frightened by the suddenness of his entrance and his angry look, stood still.

"Didn't ye hear? or shall I get the Corp——"

Prairie Ralph's open hand flat on the Constable's mouth silenced him for an instant.

"Ye're under 'rest! Corp'al, ye seen that? He struck me!"

"I didn't see anything of the sort, Constable," the other answered gravely.

"Ye *what*? Why, boil yer liver, ye liar, he——"

Quietly Dickson took out a notebook: "Insubordination last night, failure to obey orders, and objectionable language to your superior." He looked up smiling. "The list is getting on; anything more?"

Scowling Elkins restrained himself. It was not his game to get into trouble, as the Corporal held supreme power.

Grinning maliciously, he pulled the spur from its hiding-place. "See that, Prairie? *That* belongs t' Tom Watts, an' he wuz *here* drought-time. About a thousand dollars fur ye, eh?"

The big ranchman laughed heartily. "You're mad, Constable," he said, went over to a shelf, and tossed another spur, mate to the one Elkins had, on the table. "There's the other. Glad you found the one I lost while I was cutting up some beef."

Timidly the girl stared at these men, her heart thumping. Prairie Ralph had often told her of the results of "crossing" the police, and of what a good reputation meant with them. And now——? She shivered.

"Ralph"—Elkins' voice was calm now—"ye've got

th' name o' never havin' lied, but I've ketched ye at it! Them *ain't* yer spurs, for ye never wore one, an' *them* wouldn't fit a boot in th' place! Show me one that they would! Tom wuz a *little* feller, ye mind!"—sneeringly.

The game was up. Ralph knew it, so did the Corporal, and the girl vaguely realised that danger impended.

Elkins sat down with a grunt of content. "H'm!" he snorted: "killin' beef with the sun a-doin' it fur ye! *An'* no water! Umph, *fine* yarn, that!"

Dickson and Prairie Ralph went outside in the Indian summer morning.

Glorious tints of amber, ochre, and grey-brown made up the landscape, that fell away in clear-cut lines of arroyo and ravine until beyond the eye.

"Hard luck, Terry! A thousand dollars I haven't got. It's been a tough-pull year! And the missus?"

Tears blurred the ranchman's vision. He dashed them off furtively. "And you?"

"A year, and—discharge!"

The Corporal forlornly yet bravely faced the disgrace and the end of his career. It had come through an act of kindness and mercy, but the Service knows no sentiment.

"Aren't those riders yonder?" the ranchman asked suddenly.

Dickson shaded his eyes. "Yes; four of them. Wonder who that is?" he added, watching steadily.

Something glinted in the sunlight.

"Why, it's the Inspector!"

They stared at one another.

"The end's nearer than we thought!" Prairie Ralph said satirically.

"Good-morning, Ralph. Ah, Dickson, just the man I want. Read that."

Scarcely able to hold out a steady hand, the Corporal reached for the long despatch the other gave him.

"I was going to send Alec to Rock Ledge with it; lucky I did not, now," the Inspector continued, dismounting.

Dickson read on: "Commissioner's office, Regina. To Inspector Gibbs. Thomas Watts died in Edmonton last night, at 11.10, and requested following message be given Corporal Dickson of Rock Ledge Post:

"I don't mind the shot you got me with at Prairie Ralph's, Dickson, because you had your duty to do; and tell Ralph I'm dying without holding any grudge against him for trying to help you against me. I lost a spur somewheres around the shack, and gave the other to Ralph. Ask him for them and keep them as a remembrance of Tom Watts. There is a bit of money in the bank at Brandon. Use this message, get it out and see that the missus receives it. It is little enough, God knows. That's all, Terry Dickson, good luck to you. Do you remember how it rained, Ralph, when we needed it most?"

Listlessly the Corporal's hand dropped by his side, tears trickling from his chin.

The Inspector coughed and "hemmed." "Quite natural, quite natural, Dickson. Death—sad thing;

good man gave way in anger—too bad. I sha'n't mention your not reporting having wounded him, but I shall mention Prairie Ralph's ever-ready and evident support of the Police. Ahem! Oh yes, you will see about Mrs Watts's money, Dickson? I could not get it at Brandon: bank clerk said you would have to come personally and present that despatch. Fool clerk! That's all. Your cattle are looking well again, Ralph!"

"Ye—yes, thank you, Inspector," the ranchman stuttered.

"That's good—that's excellent. Good luck!"

And away the four went, cantering lightly over the soft, dew-moistened earth, the clankety-clank of carbine against stirrup echoing softly.

"Let me see?" the ranchman said, taking the despatch.

Wee prairie songsters fluttered ~~gaily~~ about, their liquid notes trembling with life, and, barely visible, to the north'ard, a long V-wedge of geese migrating from the Great Bear and Slave Lake regions winged their steady way to warmer climes and luxurious feeding grounds. Now and again their plaintive *honk—honk—hoank* drifted to the two men.

"There died a hero, Dickson!" Ralph said hoarsely. "He suspected somebody would find the lost spur, and he remembered—us"—whispering; the big man finished—"and our danger as he faced his Maker."

Neither said more.

Elkins slept in the only arm-chair. Elsie's eyes were red with crying. She had watched the Inspector come and go, fearing the worst.

The Constable woke at their entrance. "Well"—he stretched and yawned—"guess I'll be goin' on to Edmonton."

"Go and be damned to you!" the Corporal said evenly.

"Ye'll sing another tune, my Corp'ral, after I sees Watts!"

"He'll be a foot under ground by the time you get there!"

"Another game?" Elkins laughed outright. "I kin see th' Inspector, anyhow, can't I?"—ironically.

Prairie Ralph chuckled when Dickson answered, solemnly as ever: "If you had been awake you could have seen him here. He has been, and gone on. By the way, he brought this for me.

The Constable took the yellow sheet. As he read, his face became whiter and whiter. "I don't believe a cussed word of it!" he swore savagely.

"That's immaterial to me." The Corporal shrugged his shoulders. "Mrs Ralph, could I beg some coffee? And let me congratulate you on Prairie's high standing with *us*, of the Service, adding that Tom Watts died last night as a brave man should die, his last thought for others, when others little thought of him in life. Give me the spur you have, Ralph. *You* can keep *yours* if it is a comfort to you"—to Elkins.

The latter flung the paper parcel on the floor, rushed out, saddled and tore away on the Inspector's trail, going like mad.

Shortly afterwards the Corporal mounted. "I'll drop in again soon, Ralph. Cheer up, and God bless you!"

The girl drew shyly near the handsome soldier. "Would you mind giving this to Tom's wife for me?" She held out a little gold heart-locket on a tiny chain. "It was my mother's," she said simply, "and one of the few things I hold many tender recollections by. Therefore I give it to her with my gratitude and love."

The light dimmed to the Corporal's eyes. He blinked hard, took the trinket, and tucked it away. "She shall have it, Mrs Ralph, and the story of how it was given."

Arm about her waist, Prairie Ralph and his wife saw Dickson out of sight for Brandon. "Life is *new* to me, fresh, Elsie; and yet"—sadly—"because of the death of a *man*."

"Yes, Boy," she answered. "Tom died a *man* that we might live."



## THE LESSON

### I

TINY whiffs of a southerly breeze gently moved the papers on the big table in Prairie Ralph's shack.

"Well, Elsie, girl, unless the sheep men come up on us, I think that we have a big year ahead."

"No way to stop them?" Crooning a lullaby, the girl slowly rocked the tiny form in her arms—trying to make its fingers work.

Ralph—Big Ralph—dusty and begrimed from the plough and foam-clots of horses, leaned against the jamb.

From afar came the sound of men's voices; rough and harsh they seemed in the stillness.

"We've seeded Four and Seven to-day. It ought to show before long if this weather holds on!"

Great opaque vistas of cloud-lines stretched away to the north and east; filmy screens of white and grey letting the sunlight through intermittently, whose shadows stole across the North World as noiseless, but not shapeless, spectres.

"He's asleep!" the girl whispered.

The man turned quietly, tiptoed in his rough boots

to the side of the "home-made" crib, that consisted of a planed box on two cross-holds, and flour-barrel staves for rockers.

"So he is!" Ralph almost held his breath.

As if controlled by the same thought, their eyes met.

"God bless him!" the big man muttered.

And with feline maternal love she drew the patched coverlet closer about the little face; then she looked at him again. "Ours!"

He nodded.

She leaned across the crib. "Tommy Watts! He always said that *it*"—shyly pointing to the child—"would be a boy!"

"Thomas Ralph Dane we'll name him, then!"

"Tommie"—she drove away an inquisitive fly—"yes—Tommie!"

Lithe and strong the girl was, in her short skirt, her heavy shoes, and old coat. Masses of hair tumbled about the oval face.

"I must get dinner!"—with a quick look at the alarm clock that ticked mercilessly from its nail.

"That's so!" he answered absent-mindedly; then he turned: "Yang, you lazy Chinaman, where are you?"

"Me fixee allee light tings Missee Lalph for cookee!"

The weazened yellow face stuck itself forward, and was gone with Jack-in-the-Box effect.

"Good boy, Yang?"

"Yes, Ralph; and so fond of Bab—of 'Tommie'!"

With a laugh, a merry toss of her head, she disappeared into the long cook-room behind the main house.

"Me allee fine get leady beef steak, Missee Ralph!"

"Yes; but you haven't peeled the potatoes, Yang!"

"Oh, allee light. Me tinkee white man eatee ebbbliting same—skinee on, skinee off, putlatoe allee same?"

With deft fingers he used the long knife rapidly, humming a weirdly-minor chant the while.

"What's that you're singing?" Elsie shoved the steak between the grids and roasted the juicy slices over the glaring coals, whose reflection was a sombre red on the planked ceiling.

"Me singee samee song—wishee. No. 1 luck Bossee Ralph's boy!"

As he dropped the potatoes one by one into the huge kettle, he swung his head from side to side so that the long pig-tail should not dip into the water. "Missee Ralph?"

"Yes," she answered, turning the meat from time to time, and shaking salt over it.

"You know Billee Ellis?"

"The foreman? Yes."

The chant kept on, but the Chinaman's aloe eyes were fixed on her.

"He allee samee say he makee love to Missee Ralph, an' he——"

She turned angrily. "Why, Bossee Ralph kill him if he thought that. Yang, you've been 'smoking' again."

"Me smokee, me see jus' samee, an'——" he broke into the chant again—"Yang tellee you make big heap watch!"

Not another word could she get out of him.

That Ellis had often furtively looked into her eyes she knew, but how the Chinaman had found it out was beyond her.

Bill Ellis was a typical foreman. Big and rough, a doctor in his way; but his life, previous to his coming into the North-west, was closely sealed so far as he would vouchsafe any information. A man, in short, whose reputation had always been that "Bill Ellis was *first*, the rest came afterwards."

He had a peculiar aptitude in the handling of men; could get more out of them than any foreman in the Provinces; but it had been long suspected that he and the sheep-herders had good cause to stand by one another.

A strange premonition—what it was she could not fathom—came over Elsie. She looked at the Chinaman, but he was busy digging the potatoes out of the kettle.

"How are things going, Bill?" Ralph asked.

"Fine! Couldn't be better; and if the infernal sheep aren't driven across us, we'll do well,"—a mouthful of bread and steak—"Yes, *damned* well, at that!"

From her place at the foot of the table Elsie watched the foreman, and she saw that his eyes crept nearer and nearer to hers. She shivered unconsciously, and looked towards the crib.

Prairie Ralph swallowed his tea leisurely. "What makes you think that there is any chance of their driving across us?"

Just the flicker in Ellis's eyes, but the girl saw it.

"I don't know; but the sheepers are a bad lot, and if they get the idea that one way is better for them than another they go ahead—regardless."

"Regardless of *us*, you mean?"

"Anybody and everybody, but——"

Yang dropped a plate, that crashed into fragments on the floor.

The girl understood his hint.

Thenceforward the talk was general; and Ralph did not see.

They all tramped out to work again, the Boss leading—save Ellis.

Without a word he sprang at Elsie, kissed her, and held her to him. "Can't you see that I'm mad about you—absolutely *mad*? I am your husband's foreman—true, but I'm a herder just the same. Don't scream!" he said hoarsely, "for if you do I'll give the signal and in ten days every seed will be trampled beyond hope of growth. That means ruin to Ralph," he whispered, "and no home for him," pointing to the crib.

Silence; a breathless panting quiet.

"Just a kiss, that's all I ask, and you can rely——"

"*Don't!*—Yang!"

The Chinaman had forced his knee into the foreman's back; a quick twist, a wrench, and the white man was on the floor—cook, knife between his teeth, clawing open Ellis's shirt.

"Me stlikee velly nice—no blood; me killee?"

For just an instant her woman's pride craved revenge. She stood over the two men. One

helpless, the other waiting for her word to finish his work.

Flies—the first crop of the year—crawled stiffly up and down the table-cloth. Unwittingly she saw it all, and listened to the distant sound of men's voices.

"And *you*, a man, threaten a woman? Try to *steal* a kiss—yet 'stealing' is too good a word! Try to *force* a kiss from her for her husband's sake! Look here, Ellis"—she moved closer—"if I should tell the boys about this they'd cut you to pieces, and Ralph—he would——"

"Me killee now?" The Chinaman's eyes were ablaze with blood-lust. "Me cuttee all up; hidee plenty nice, allee light!"

She looked down at Ellis.

The sunlight fell in warm, golden shafts across his face and naked brawny chest.

"No, Yang, let him go. He's had his lesson."

She fled into the open, to breathe pure air again.

Slowly the cook rose. Knife still between his teeth, he watched Ellis get painfully to his feet and limp to the men's quarters.

"You damnee near Happy Land, Billee Ellis!"

## II

A few weeks later Prairie Ralph rubbed his hands gleefully together. "By Heavens, Elsie, it's going to be a record year!"

As far as one could see from the main house, acres on acres of green fell away into the horizon. On

hill slopes, where the sun's light was strongest, the colour glared, and in the valleys the shade was deeper by contrast.

Little tender shoots of wheat showed barely three inches over ground, but each one sturdy, full of great promise.

Everything seemed combined to make the big ranchman happy. Cattle doing well, weather superb, wife and child in good health.

Standing there, the brisk north-west wind fluttering the ends of his red neckerchief, small wonder that Prairie Ralph was content.

"By the way, Elsie, Bill hasn't got over that awkward limp of his, *yet!* Funny, that is; and he tells some story about getting off a plough. Have you noticed?"

"Yes; I've seen it."

"Curiously, though, girl, I think that Yang knows more than he will tell! I see him watching Bill all the time; but there is no use in questioning a 'chink.'"

He lighted his pipe, drew up a heavy stool, leaned back against the rough wall, and watched her sewing busily, a peaceful look in his keen eyes.

She was uncomfortable.

Since the day that the foreman had kissed her she had been in terror lest the cook should "knife" him; and she knew what it meant to tell Ralph.

Besides, she expected any hour to hear the dreaded cry of "Sheep coming!" because Ellis had been too passionate to lie, and she believed that he could control the herders.

And as time passed these worries became deep-set.

Once Ralph chaffed her at breakfast for talking in her sleep.

"I *never* do that," she laughed.

"Oh, but you did last night. You said, '*Don't, Yang,*' quite plainly. Ha!"—the big man chuckled—"Chink was probably putting salt in the cake or cutting the holes out of dough-nuts!"

He did not see the glint in Yang's eyes, nor the quick look that passed between his foreman and the cook.

Sometimes the girl felt as if it were more than she could bear; but everything promised so well that she would not disrupt the household, especially, as of late Ellis had been courtesy itself, and very painstaking on the ranch.

Then *it* happened. How or why, or exactly when, no one knew; even Yang could not suggest a cause.

Supper was long over. Ellis had gone with Ralph to look at some new reapers that Atkins had on the next ranch, twelve miles away, and Elsie took her chair out into the beautiful gloaming.

Pale, and as dainty wraith-wisps, clouds drifted across the sun's dying shafts, and in the upper heavens blobs of green-grey and crimson gave sign of the continuance of good weather. The cheery *tinkle-tinkle-ting* of cow bells—the home herd—floated ever so softly on the evening air, and good-night warblings from the ravine-side echoed to the gurgling music of cool waters.

The girl breathed deep of the quiet, unconsciously

watching the flash-changes of the evening star—now cold-grey, then warm-yellow, with glimpses of pink and meteoric-red between.

It grew chill. The air had a tinge of dampness, and she went in. . . .

"*Yang!*" she screamed.

Inert on the floor, wee hands clenched, veins in his temple purple with surcharged blood, Tommie lay, his feet caught in the coverlet, and a dribble of ugly red dropping from a cut of the sharp barrel-stave rocker.

No answer.

She picked up the little form.

"*Yang!*"

"Me comee velly No. 1 now!"

Pigtail unbraided, shirt tails streaming, the Chinaman tore into the room knife in hand. "Me kil——!" Then he saw.

Elsie was incapable of anything.

"Me takee Missee Lalph; *me* takee Bossee Lalph's boy."

He took the child from her, held its head upward, and gently tossed it up and down.

"Me 'flaid velly bad No. 1 cut on top-side head. No Dloct' here same time. Yang jumpee horse, go allee same quick B'london?"

She had collapsed, sobbing hysterically in the corner. "How? How? How?" she moaned continuously.

"Yang no knowee '*how*'! Yang goee jus' same quick-time fetchee Dloct'?"

"Ye-ye-yes!" she moaned, taking the child, and trying with bits of cloth to stop the bleeding.

"Hello! What's this?"

Prairie Ralph, Bill Ellis at his heels, met the Chinaman in his headlong speed to the stable.

"Boy, Bossee! Boy cut top-side head! No. 1 velly bad cut! Me go Blandon Dloct'!"

"You've been smoking again, Yang. *Not much* do you go to Brandon! Come along with me, or *you'll* get a 'No. 1 top-side head cut'!"

"Boy, Bossee! Missee Lalph she allee——"

"What's that?" Ralph heard the girl's moans; and rushed ahead.

"Me tellee——"

"*At last*, Ralph! Oh my God, how I've prayed for you!"

She threw herself into his arms. "Yang has gone for the doctor at Brandon; that's the best I could do."

"Bossee no lettee me go. Allee same, Yang makee biggee jump top-time."

Ellis nabbed him by his hair as he tried to scuttle past.

In answer to the unspoken thought in the eyes of Ralph and the girl, he said, very slowly, "I am a bit of a doctor myself: would you mind letting me see what I can do?"

He picked the still unconscious child from the crib, examined the gash, then, turning briskly, said, "There is the chance of a severe fracture—merely a chance, of course, but as the skull is so malleable because of his tender age, I *may* be able to do something."

"You?" Prairie Ralph stared at him. "I had no idea——"

"Time is valuable, and if you don't mind I will get my instruments."

He disappeared.

"Can we trust him?" the girl whimpered (knowing what she knew).

"God bless him, I would trust him anywhere with *anything*; but I never dreamed that——"

"Now, Mrs Ralph, will you and Ralph be so good as to leave the room?"—the foreman hesitated—"and you do not object to Yang helping me?"

Speaking rapidly, he opened a small case of instruments and a roll of bandages.

"Do your best, Ellis."

The foreman and the Boss shook hands.

"That I will!"

### III

"Me allee samee say you No. 1 Joshman, an' Yang takee all back."

The girl could not force herself to thank Ellis for saving the boy, except in a formal way when Ralph was present.

The latter was pitiful in his gratitude.

"Had it not been for you, the kid would have 'gone under,' Bill, and I'm—well, I simply cannot express myself. Even Yang appreciates what you have done for us."

One day the foreman saw Elsie putting down a clutch of eggs; there was no one near.

"Mrs Ralph?"

She jumped up.

"All that I wish to say is that I did the best I could to return a life for a life. You had it in your power to take mine; I held your child's in my fingers. We are not 'even' yet," he said quickly, as she tried to speak, "for you have taught me a great lesson. I leave to-morrow, and——"

"But what will Ralph say?"

"That is for you to determine."

## BROTHERS

### I

BATTLEFORD, Saskatchewan, lay glaringly new in the August sunlight. Its only substantial building was the R.N.W.M. Police post. That was white, and stood out sharply in contrast to the rough unplanned boards and uneven shingles of a score of "shacks." The "town" had sprung up almost in a night; with it had come the inevitable bar and the roulette-wheel.

Wooded hillsides and stretches of green rose and rolled away into the distance until they joined the space of the prairies beyond.

Noon, and everything quiet.

The *clack-clack* of building hammers had ceased. Scarcely a sound, save for that of tin dishes rattling and the murmur of voices somewhere.

Buzzards wheeled solemnly overhead, mere specks against the clear blue, and the horses tied before the smithy's roofless anvil munched slowly, now and then whisking away the great green flies.

Prairie Ralph and Corporal Dickson were having dinner together in the tiny cook-room behind police quarters.

"Lord, it's hot, Terry!"

The other looked up from his job of opening a tin of beef.

"Nearly as bad as the drought, Prairie?"

"My stars, *no!*" The big man chuckled.—"But Terry it's a strange thing that in life the unpleasant things fade away; only happy memories remain always."

"*There*, darn you!"—with a wrench the policeman yanked the cover from the tin. "Yes, that's so; but I'll bet it'll be a long day before that hour we had together when Inspector Gibbs came 'fades away'!"

The ranchman said nothing.

While Dickson put the kettle on the small shiny-clean stove, his mind's eye saw that scene vividly.

"Terry?" he said abruptly.

"What?"

"I want to ask you a question, and I want"—the big man stood up, huge in his riding boots—"I want—a—straight—answer," he finished slowly.

Dickson turned. "Good Lord, man! what's on your chest now?"

His eyes set on the clearing across the valley, Prairie walked to the door.

"Last night I went into Slack Jim's; there was a man there drinking and playing hard. I've never seen him before, but Slack called him Vannie."

He did not see the expression that crossed the policeman's face.

"This man Vannie," he continued, "got drunk, and began to talk about Bill Ellis and—and Elsie." His voice became hard and cold. "Said that Ellis

had been in love with her all the time he was my foreman, and that the only reason the herders didn't drive across me was because——" He stopped and swung his head until his eyes met those of the constable.

Neither spoke.

"You understand me, Terry?"

"What did you do?"

"Nothing; nobody knew me, and I kept my mouth shut! What I want to ask you is this." He put both hands on the smaller man's shoulder. "You have often stayed with us before Ellis left. Did you ever think anything of the sort?"

"You want an answer, no matter how it hits?"

"I do!"

"Yes, I did think it, and more than once."

"Prairie Ralph's face went very white. His hands slid limply to his sides, but the deep eyes narrowed, and their pupils dilated strangely.

"But, mind you, Prairie, I think it was all on his side; I mean——"

"Great God! you don't have to tell me that! All I wish for now is to find Ellis, and"—a long pause—"talk—to—him."

"Come, come, Prairie, it's all done with. Ellis is heaven knows where, and you said yourself that only happy memories remain always."

"My memories were happy ones till last night. Who's Vannie?"

"Comes from Edmonton way," Dickson answered, simulating carelessness.

"That's a lie, Terry! I know you too well. Who is he?"

The other's hand was steady as he poured tea into the boiling water. "He is—oh, he's Ellis's brother!"

Prairie Ralph stared in amazement. "Why *his* name was"—he thought for a moment—"can't remember it now; but I met him years ago, and we didn't get on. Tall slim chap, deaf, great card and pool player. So-o-o"—he drawled quietly—"this is my old friend again, eh?"

The constable said nothing.

Outside, the full heat bore down scorchingly. Not a human being moved on the "main street"; only the same confused murmur of voices in the humid air.

"Two brothers and a sister"—the ranchman went on ruminatingly—"yes, that's it. I remember it all. She married a chap from the East, a broker, and lives there yet. Well"—he squared his shoulders—"let's eat. I'll see Vanfie later!"

"Hello, daddy!"

With a whoop Tommie ran in and stood by his father, whose eyes instantly lost their hard, bitter look.

"*There's* a boy, if you like, Terry! Rode all the sixty miles on his new cayuse."

"And didn't get a bit tired," the sturdy lad added.

"We'll have you in the Service yet!" Dickson laughed.

"He might do worse—a lot worse," Prairie Ralph said in a low tone.

"Oh, an' wear revolvers like Terry's, an' catch 'bad' men? What fun!"

Both men laughed.

The boy's fresh young presence seemed to clear the atmosphere of everything unclean. He helped himself to bread and butter, tea and beef.

"Dad!"

"Well?"

"See what a man gave me this morning for holding his pony!" From his treasure pocket under the little goatskin shaps he tugged a small medallion.

With an oath the ranchman seized it.

The lad was frightened. "I only held——"

"That's all right, Tommie."

By a tremendous effort Prairie Ralph got control of himself. "Now run along, but don't go far, in case I should need you.—Hers, Terry! *Hers!* I gave it to her when—when——"

"Ellis stole it, no doubt, and his brother has got hold of it. There's nothing in that!" Dickson clapped the other on the shoulder.

The muscles in the ranchman's face stood out as cords along his jaws. "I'll go and see Vannie," he muttered.

"Steady's the word, Prairie!"

The other's eyes blazed. "Aye, steady's the word!"

He started for the door.

"Where the hell's the constable?"

Half-drunk and "fighting mad," Vannie Ellis strode in. Catching sight of Dickson he collected himself. "I've been robbed of a gold medal, a little thing; but it isn't mine, and my brother——Ha!" he laughed discordantly. "my brother has what he calls 'rec'lections' that go with it! He'd have a fit

if I lost it. And"—searching his pockets again—"I haven't lost it neither! Not by a sight!"

Prairie Ralph waited and listened; the constable watched him.

"How do you account for its disappearance?" the latter asked.

"Haven't I told you?—*robbed!*"

"Whom do you suspect?"

Methodically Dickson took down his complaint book to make the entry.

Still fumbling about his clothes, the man looked round the small interior and saw Prairie Ralph by the door. "Who the hell are you?"

The ranchman put his hand to his belt side, so did Vannie; Dickson had his weapon on his knee under the table.

"None of your cursed business?"

Each man thought that the others could hear the thumping of his heart.

"Don't know that it is, stranger. No offence!"

Hands dropped to sides.

"You see," the newcomer began again, "I got some kid to hold my pony this morning, and he must have picked my—— *There he goes now!*" he shouted as Tommie passed with another boy.

"I'll break his——" Vannie rushed for the door.

The ranchman filled that space. "Hold on a minute!"

Dickson did not like the metallic ring in Prairie's voice.

"Get out of my way! That's the brat that stole——"

"This?" the big man asked, holding out the medallion.

The other stared into the hollow of the ranchman's hand.

"Yes, by God! How did *you* get it?" He leered cunningly at the constable. "I see! share and share alike, eh? Well, I'll give you a hundred dollars for it! But I'd like to break that kid's neck, just the same!"

So pleased was he to think that the stolen medallion was found, that he became confidential, counting out money as he talked.

"My brother was foreman on Prairie Ralph's ranch years ago. I believe that it is somewhere about seventy miles from here?"—looking up.

Prairie Ralph nodded. "I know him."

"And my brother told me—he didn't exactly *tell* me, but I inferred—that he and Prairie Ralph's wife understood each other; so I put two and two together and did not make *six* out of it; neither could any one else. He, Bill Ellis, kept the herders away, and performed some kind of an operation that saved their child's life.—Eighty-six, eighty-seven, eighty-eight—yes"—the table was covered with money—"yes—eighty-nine, ninety; and you don't suppose that Bill did it for fun? *Oh no!* Ninety-two—four—six—eight—one hundred. There!"

He gathered the money together, held it in one hand, and reached for the medallion with the other.

Something in Prairie Ralph's eyes stopped him.

"Do you want more?" he asked.

The ranchman said nothing for an instant.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked then.

By this time Vannie had recovered. "No, and I don't care! Set your price, you son of——"

"Well, I go by the name of Prairie Ralph, if that is of any use to you?"

The constable was ready.

"Yes," the ranchman went on; "and all that you have said does you credit." He put the medallion back in his pocket. "What I want to say is *this*!"

One bound, and, before Dickson could move, Vannie was an inert heap on the floor, so tremendous had been Prairie Ralph's blow.

"Good-bye, Terry! the boy and I will start for home. If I'm 'wanted' for this, you know where to find me."

Side by side, father and son loped out of Battleford just as the sun was sinking behind a breastwork of massive clouds. Its light was lurid, and the heavy scarlet of the skies promised a storm.

The constable saw their figures out of sight in the distance.

"Flames of hell! I'll get square with him!" Vannie struggled to his feet. "And with you too!" he flung back at Dickson, with another curse, as he lurched away.

## II

The moon rose slowly over the north-west, its first cold rays falling on Tumbleside Mountain, causing the ravines and arroyos to seem as black, unfathomable things. Here and there stars' light came, but

the chill sheen of the moon's splendour dimmed their radiance.

Scarcely a sound on the prairie, save that of the *jingle-jingle* of bits and the soft noise of horses' feet loping onward, as Prairie Ralph and Tommie went steadily towards home.

"Tired, laddie?"

"Not a bit, dad!"

Foxes barked and fled, bats fluttered about their heads as they passed down into the darknesses between hills, where the echo of clinking stones was magnified, and from whence came the long, melancholy calls of owls.

*Whip-poor-Will. Whip-poor-Will.*

The bird's night-song was the only cheerful sound.

"Would you remember that man's face? The one that gave——"

*Cra-a-ng!*

All echoes woke, vying with one another, and the rifle report carried far beyond the glen, until it was lost on the distant heights that loomed ugly, and far above.

Prairie Ralph felt himself slipping—slipping from the saddle. A sense of numbness seized his brain.

Going—going—"Is this death?" he wondered. It seemed so easy.

"Dad? Dad?"

His senses fought for existence at the boy's voice. "I'm badly hurt, Tommie. Can you find your way home, lad? I want to see mother before I—before morning. Can you do it, lad?" His voice was getting weak fast.

The child nodded bravely, swallowing hard. "Which is—is the way, daddy?"

"Brave lad, dad's own. Listen carefully. You see that star just over the peak of the hill?"

"The one that shines so big?"

"Yes. Keep it on your right till you come to the first river. You remember where dad showed you how to cross?"

"Ye-yes."

"Then—then"—the ranchman coughed, and turned his head away, so that the boy should not see what came—"then keep the 'big' star straight ahead, and let Pansy do—do the rest. You're not afraid—for mother's sake?"

"No, dad."

"Go on, then, and God bless you! Tell mother that dad wants to see her at once in Hope Valley, and give her the thing that the man gave you. Here it is."

He heard the boy mount, heard the choked sobbing in his throat, got himself on an elbow, and listened eagerly to the dwindling sound of Pansy's feet, going up the glen.

"Vannie did me," he groaned. "I saw him leave just after us; something warned me to go back. Thank God it was I and not Tommie!"

He lay back on the rough fern and grasses, listlessly thinking of how short a thing life is.

His horse nibbled close by, now and then snuffling suspiciously when the taint of fresh blood came to its nostrils.

"Bless the girl! I hope that—she—gets—here—in—time. It—seems—hard—to—die—alone, all—

alone; and yet I seem to—hear—to—see”—his mind wandered—“a light somewhere! a bright—light!—yes—a—very—white light! I wonder if——”

He was unconscious.

Hour after hour of darkness passed. Coyotes came, sniffed, recognised that the prone figure was still alive, and stole away.

Prairie Ralph did not move.

Then the timid gleams of day broke over the eastern horizon then; their soft glow strengthened and broadened until the heavens were ablaze with light. The air was still with that peculiar early morning stillness.

Two riders stopped on the up trail across the glen, looking down.

“Whose horse can that be?”

Bill Ellis—for it was he—and Jack Sims, his companion, dismounted and led their horses down. At first they did not see Prairie Ralph.

“Strange, this is? Well, we’re ‘in’ a horse, evidently. I wonder what Vannie will think of this! He likes mystery—— What the deuce is——? it’s *Prairie Ralph!*”

The two stared at each other and at the body.

“Wounded, too, by God! and from behind! Hustle now, rip off that coat, but careful about it.”

“Maybe I’ll have a chance to save you, too, Ralph,” his old foreman whispered to himself.

“S-s-s-s-s-t!” Sims gave the slight warning “Somebody sneaking up the trail!”

“Into the bushes! He won’t see our horses, and we’ll find out what this all means.”

They hid themselves instantly.

Vannie, well fortified with whisky, reached the fallen man.

"Good shot for over a hundred yards in bad light!"

He began searching the other's pockets.

"You won't stand in Bill's way *much* longer!" he muttered, then swore when he could not find the object of his search. "Bet that kid's got it again!" I'll——" He started up as though he had seen a ghost.

"Didn't think I was so near, did you, Brother Van?" The bushes closed behind Bill Ellis as he stepped forward.

"So—this is more of your work, you skulking hound?"

The other could not speak.

"Jack!" the foreman called.

Sims appeared as strangely as had Bill.

"Watch that cur, and, if he attempts to skedaddle, 'down' him!"

"Right-O!"

Then, with deft fingers, Bill tore up strips of his own and Prairie Ralph's undershirts, and bandaged the wound tightly.

"Left lung touched a little, but bullet gone right through. He's strong; there isn't much danger. Give me a hand to lift him higher."

The instant Sims's eyes were off him, Vannie turned and ran straight down the trail.

"Shoot, you fool!" Bill shouted. The other did not fire. The foreman grabbed the carbine; its sharp bellow woke the echoes again.

"That's fratricide, Bill," Sims said in awe, as the figure writhed, then was quiet.

"Fratricide—devil! Good riddance! It would have come, anyway. I've long wanted the chance, because he's been using a good woman's name in connection with mine. That's what I came up to see him about. He's a thief, too."

The sun was high now, and Prairie Ralph moved slightly. Bill poured some whisky down his throat. The wounded man opened his eyes. "What happen——?"

"Ralph—*Ralph!*"

Elsie, dust-covered and exhausted, flung herself on her knees by her husband, scarce noticing Bill and Sims.

"It's all right, Mrs Ralph. I've had the luck to be able to help him again." In few words he told the story.

"But your brother?"

"Yonder," he answered gravely. She followed his eyes, then covered her face to blot out the sight.

"Somebody else below!" Sims said.

The clatter of a horse coming on fast reached them. Constable Dickson rounded the far turn of the trail, his horse covered with foam. It shied as it passed Vannie's body.

Before the constable could ask any questions Bill surrendered himself, stating the facts and supported by Sims's evidence.

Dickson nodded. "I thought as much, but didn't hear of Van's leaving till early to-day, and here I am."

Prairie Ralph moved weakly. "Elsie?"

"Everything is all right, Ralph, and——"

"The medallion?" he whispered.

"Yes," she answered cheerily. "Tommie gave it to me. I missed it long ago, Boy, and thought that Yang must have stolen it."

The ranchman's eyes glistened. "It *was* stolen, but I—I got—it—back."

There was a pause.

Dickson coughed awkwardly. "Of course, Bill," he said, "I must take you into custody until you are heard by a magistrate; but it will be all right."

Silently the ex-foreman handed over his weapons, the woman not understanding that it was because of her.

"It's only twenty miles to Ralph's. We can sling him between two of the horses comfortably enough. I'll bandage him there, and he'll do with quiet," Ellis suggested.

Preparations were made.

"Why did you kill—him?" pointing with a shudder to the clump of bushes beyond. "*Tell me!*" she added, looking searchingly at him.

Tall and gaunt, with great sadness in his eyes, he towered above her slight figure.

"It was a matter between brothers," he answered gravely.

She turned away, then stopped. "There *must* be some other reason besides that of his wounding Ralph?"

He shook his head. "None!"

## "HAVING TAKEN THE OATH"

### I

INSPECTOR Gibbs and Sergeant M'Pherson walked slowly across the barracks square of the R.N.W.M. Police headquarters at Regina.

A November wind whistled mournfully through the leafless trees; the skies were sodden and grey, and the long low buildings seemed desolately forlorn—cheerless in their severe white and drab.

The Inspector drew his cape closer about him. "Another winter to face, Sergeant!" said he, as though seeking sympathy from the heavily built Scotchman.

"Ay, sir, an' whin it beginnit sae brawly 'tis boun' tae be a wheestler!"

The Inspector looked at his companion impatiently. "Does a Scotchman *ever* see anything from a cheerful point of view?"

The flicker of a smile crossed the other's face. "Ay, sir, *whin* there's ae guid tae be see't!"

From the drill-ground came the riding-master's hoarse tones as he laboured with his rookies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Newly enlisted men.

"Fours for'ard—fours right—Trot!" Then the sound of many shod feet.

"Not *that* way, you backwoods axe-slinger! Stick on your horse in some sort o' shape, not like a trick monkey on a performin' dog? Strike me silly if I ever saw such work! Say, men," the stentorian tones changed to pleading ones—"the Commissioner 'll be back from Ottowy soon, an' he'll ax me fust thing 'how's my rookies?' You boys don't want me to get the 'call down' for not workin' over you?"

"No! Three cheers for Sergeant Donaldson!" The rattle of staccato sound was like musketry in the cold air.

"That's enough, men; thet 'll do for noise! Now, rookie Tom Dane, for a finishin' touch let's see you pick up your hat at speed."

The young man, Prairie Ralph's son, put the heavy Ontario horse at full gallop, dropping his sombrero as he started. Turning with a yell at the upper end of the drill-ground, he swept back again, leaning gracefully from the saddle, his fingers trailing on the grass. A deft reach and he had the sombrero.

"You must have been born in the saddle—if it was possible!" Donaldson muttered with a grin of pride. Then—"Now, mind the next order. *By twos—guide—left—gallop!*"

The thunder of horses speeding over turf rumbled.

"Halt!"

A moment's silence.

Gibbs and M'Pherson listened on the steps of the Inspector's office.

"That's well done, men!" from Donaldson.

Stables all! shrilled the bugle.

"The men like him, Sergeant?" Gibbs asked.

"Twad be a quare mon who did-na."

The two went into the austere office; Gibbs sat down before a roll desk, littered with papers. The other stood.

"Sit down, Sergeant; I have a matter of importance to consult you about."

The use of the word "consult" is rare in the police from a superior to an inferior.

When he heard it, M'Pherson methodically placed his sombrero between his knees, peak down, and waited. The Inspector's eyes unconsciously saw the outside.

Plain drab roofs, well-kept gravel paths, remnants of summer flower beds—their stalks withered and shrunk by frosts—the painfully countable trees, faint wisps of smoke dragging from stubby chimneys, and beyond the chill, bare prairie, that stretched away, flat, devoid of life.

"Word has reached me," he said abruptly, "that Bill Ellis has run amuck." Gibbs searched through the papers on the desk. "Here it is, and comes from a reliable source. What do you think?"

The Sergeant took the long slip and read carefully, whispering the words to himself. Then he gave it back.

"Tis nae for me tae gie my opeenion, for 'tis vera——"

"He's the man that killed his brother Van in Hope Valley, isn't he? Constable Dickson's evidence cleared him of that. It was something about his wife, was it not?" Gibbs interrupted.

The sharp eyes from under shaggy Scotch brows twinkled, then were expressionless.

"'Tis a' that way, sir. Weemin be unco' useful, but fer sae o' that they be geener'ly mixed in sair a lot o' men's deevilments."

Silence between the two.

With draughty puffs and muffled bellows the wind's noises came down the chimney. Now and then a clutter of soot spread itself on the fender or vanished as sparks in the fire.

"The report says that Ellis has threatened to 'hold up' the east-bound Trans-Continental. What about that?"

The big Scotchman shifted the crossing of his legs.

"An' Ellis canna do a bad job whin he begins!" he said.

"Well, well, Sergeant, what do you advise? Commissioner Berry is away, most of our good constables are on post, and this report says that the hold-up will be between Moose Jaw and Regina as soon as Ellis knows that the express car is worth it." The inspector got up, went over to a big map that hung on the wall. "There is only one place," he said, studying the ticked lines, "That he can hope to have success, and that is from Pasqua on to here; the running time is——" Gibbs got out a time-table. "Ridiculous!" he said quickly. "He would not have time to kill the messenger."

"We'll say by suppoesection, sir, that he got on at Calgary or Gleichen? 'Tis vera posseeble that he might—on t'aether hand—be a passenger from Medicine Hat. Does seem tae me, sir, that the

deestance and time in this case should be a greet eencentive."

"By George, you are a——"

A knock.

"Come!"

Donaldson pushed the green baize door open.

"Just the man I want."

Gibbs hurriedly put the report into the other's hands.

"Have you got a rookie who can ride and who is daring?"

The drill-master looked up. "That I have, sir, and a fine one. His name is——"

"Never mind his name; bring him in to me! You can vouch for him, Donaldson?"

"With my life, if there's any danger about or hard riding to do!"

M'Pherson sat, Gibbs paced restlessly to and fro while the clouds tore across the skies in dull, rended masses, with rifts of sickly white between.

"Rookie Dane, sir!" The big drill-sergeant pushed the other forward.

His eyes, erect easy carriage, powerful figure—all were instantly "sized up" by the Inspector. He wasted no words.

"Dane, I am going to entrust you with a dangerous duty, not only dangerous but one that will require a good bit of head-work." He paused.

"Yes sir?"

"Do you know a man called Bill Ellis when you see him?"

At the name Tom's brows contracted. It sounded familiar, but as Prairie Ralph and his wife had

agreed never to mention the ex-foreman, and as Tom had not seen him since that day in the police quarters at Battleford many years ago, time had snuffed out the young constable's memory of Ellis.

The Inspector was watching him keenly.

"No, sir, I do not, though the name sounded familiar at first."

M'Pherson looked discreetly at Gibbs. "He used to know——" There the Inspector stopped, seeing the warning in the Scotchman's look. "Ahem—yes. Well, I have had news that this man Ellis means to hold up the east-bound Trans-Continental." He ran over the details, from time to time consulting the long slip of paper.

"I shall want you to take the west-bound some morning, go to Gleichen, spend the night there, see if you can pick up any information at Lennon's saloon."

"Uniform, of course, sir?"

"Naturally; but carry two revolvers. Then, as I was saying, come back on the east-bound; report to me by wire should you get definite news. Here is a photograph of your man."

The Inspector stared thoughtfully out of the window. "This is your first chance, Dane; let's see what you can make of it. That's all."

The young man's eyes were aglint with excitement, and Donaldson was highly pleased.

"Now, by Jiminy-Christmus, don't go bally-high in the air! Keep your two feet on th' ground, an' remember what I tells ye, an' that is t' get the drop on him *fust*!"

"Don't you worry about that!" Dane laughed.

"Won't the dad and the mother be glad if I make a good job of it!"

He went off to his quarters.

There was silence in the grim office when the two had gone.

"Dinna ye ken, sir, that Ellis saved that young mon's life, whin he was a wee bit o' a bairn? An' ye mecht say saved Prairie Ralph's life, too, whin Van Ellis pickit him from behind?"

Gibbs swung on his heel quickly.

"I'd better not send him, then! Supposing he gets Ellis, and Ellis proves all this to him as a reason to let him go?"

The Scotchman's eyes half closed. "Human neetur, sir, is an unco strange thing. Bide a wee, sir, and let the fad work it oot for his ain self."

"Yes; but if Ellis gets away, then I——"

"I axit your pardon, sir; but I ken preety well the kind o' lad he is, and 'twill be eenterestin'—vera eenterestin'!"

"Have it your own way, Sergeant; but I have my doubts *now*."

"Thankee, sir."

The Sergeant saluted and left. "Vera eenterestin'," he said to himself as he went down the office steps.

A telegraph boy loped across the main drive and thrw himself from the saddle at the Inspector's office.

The Sergeant waited.

Gibbs read rapidly.

"One hundred thousand dollars gold on east-bound; man suspected on board. Have one man at Gleichen, others to help if necessary at Medicine

Hat." The Inspector saw M'Pherson—"Send Dane here; no answer" (to the messenger).

When Tom came, Gibbs showed him the telegram. "You will have to take the west-bound to-day. Can you make it?"

"One hour? Yes, sir."

The Scotchman heard it all. "Vera eenterestin'," he whispered again.

## II

The heavy Maritime Express thundered on its way from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean, raising great clouds of dust that eddied and billowed in its wake. The country became more and more level, falling away on either side into a blurred mass of grey. Now and then a distant squatter's homestead rose up ahead, flashed past, and disappeared as a speck behind.

"Well, well, it does seem as though we'd never get to Regina!"

Two men chatted together in the smoking-car with that freedom which is bred of a long railway journey. One was tall and powerful, with masses of hair heavily tinged with grey; the other a dapper little chap of the travelling salesman type—diamond ring and all.

He looked curiously at the big man. "Say, I'm a Yankee from way back, an' as such I'm darned curious to know your name, an' why you're so all-fired anxious to reach—to reach—what's-the-name-of-the-place?"

The big man laughed. "They call me Prairie Ralph at home, and I'm going to surprise my boy, who is in the R.N.W.M. Police stationed at Regina. Haven't seen him for five years, as I've had my work to do, and he's had his. I'm giving him a surprise party to-day."

Banter was on the lips of his companion's tongue, but the deep affection that shone in Prairie Ralph's eyes enforced respect.

"Didn't mean to be inquisitive, old man," he said, after a short silence, while the ponderous wheels under their feet roared and rhythmized over the joints. "I'm married too, an' had a youngster, but—but—well, scarlet fever! You know?" he asked apologetically.

Prairie Ralph nodded. "Too bad."

As the ranchman was about to light his pipe a burly form in slouch sombrero and long coat hurried past them up the aisle.

Prairie Ralph started. "Bill Ellis, that you?"

The stranger half turned his head, then hurried on into the next car. The ranchman's eyebrows contracted. "Damn strange! could have sworn that was Bill's back and walk!"

With *hisses* of air-brakes and clatter of trucks the long train drew into Gleichen.

Half-breeds, squatters, colonists, tourists, filled the platform, and the white-jacketed porters of the Pullman cars ran hither and thither sending telegrams, and buying sandwiches for their passengers. A group of men of the R.N.W.M. Police stood apart. One of them, a tall young fellow, was talking hurriedly, showing a photograph.

On a siding stood the west-bound express, puffing stertorously.

"All 'board for Banff, Laggan, Golden Glacier, Kamloops, and Vancouver! 'Bo-o-ard! Let her go, Jack!" the conductor shouted, and the west-bound pulled slowly away.

Prairie Ralph got out for a whiff of fresh air. Some one hurriedly cannoned into him; he looked up. "Tom!"

"Dad!"

"Why, I was just coming to look in on you at——"

"All 'board for Medicine Hat, Swift Current, Moose Jaw, Regina and the East! *All* aboard!"

Tom jumped on the car steps after his father.

"This is *great*!" the latter exclaimed. "But my surprise party won't amount to much now!"

"No, I had it on you that time!"

Suddenly Prairie Ralph noticed that the young constable had on his full kit of side-arms. This is never worn unless trouble is expected.

"Why?" the ranchman asked.

"Dad, it's the greatest luck to meet you; there's a big fracas ahead, and if I get my man it will mean a lot to me. I may need help."

Prairie Ralph's eyes shone with a strong glitter. "Hold on a minute, lad, I'll be back in a second!" While he was gone, the dapper little man moved into the seat in front of the constable, gazed admiringly at him, his uniform and his weapons.

"Say, are you the old codger's son? I mean," he added hastily, seeing the look of non-comprehension in the other's eyes, "is the old chap your father?"

"Yes!" Tom answered abruptly. His mind was so full of what lay ahead of him that he looked on every one and everything with suspicion.

Prairie Ralph came back. Both hip pockets bulged slightly. He stared significantly at his son, who understood.

"Now, what is it?"

In whispers Tom told him of the attack to be made on the \$100,000 in the express car.

"Who's doing it?" The ranchman's eyes were aglow with excitement and his big hands plucked nervously at his trousers.

"His name is——"

"Medicine Hat — *Me-de-cine Hat!*" called the brakeman.

"Damn his name!" the ranchman said; "but *is he on board?*"

"Yes, I saw him at Gleichen. Look here, guv'nor, there are police ready to board the train at this station. Can we handle our man alone?"

"*Can we?*" Prairie Ralph snorted.

Those who knew the detail of men wondered why the crowd at Medicine Hat station was so thickly dotted with the uniforms of the police. But nothing happened, and the east-bound went on its way.

Evening haze was settling down on the prairies; great banks of cloud rolled across the heavens, tinged golden, crimson, and amber by sunset rays, and tiny specks in the hurrying gloom showed that the squatters were lighting up.

"Who do you suppose I thought that I recognised a while back?"

"Who?" Tom asked.

"Bi——"

"C-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!"

The brakes set to their places with a crash. Passengers were flung forward violently. The travelling salesman yelled, "Hold up!" at the top of his lungs.

"Come on, guv'nor!"

Tom, Prairie Ralph at his heels, jammed their way through the crowd of frightened passengers to the express car. The engine was some distance down the track. A man with a revolver could barely be discerned standing over the engineer.

"Thank God, here's a policeman!" a young woman said.

Tom and Prairie Ralph had a revolver in each hand. The crowd scattered. Tom rapped sharply on the slide-door. "Open up, in the name of the King!"

A moment's silence, then—

"Curse you, *open that safe!*" The deep voice within was plainly audible. Silence.

Then—"I'll blow the whole car into nothing!"

"Blow away! We'll both go with it!" another voice—the messenger's—answered.

A faint cheer came from the quaking group outside.

"Hold your position, messenger!" the ranchman thundered, "we'll be in! Get an axe—two of 'em—you loafers; *hurry up!*"

The frightened conductor and a porter smashed the emergency tool cases and brought the axes.

"Leg-up, Tom, to the roof. You break in the slide, I'll cut my way through from above!"

*Slud—slud—cra-ack!*

Splinters flew right and left.

"My God, he's lighted the fuse! Stand clear outside!" the messenger screamed.

"Jump in 'at it! I'm nearly through!" Tom yelled, jamming his axe haft deep at every blow.

The noise of shuffling feet, the heavy breathing of struggling men. Then a shot and a curse.

"All ri-right—boys! I've smashed the fuse. Give him hell, he can't ge-get out, but I'm—I'm done for!"

A shrill whistle came from inside the car. At its sound the man guarding the engineer leaped to the ground and started to run.

From somewhere beneath the engine a little dapper figure appeared, revolver in hand.

"Oh *no*; not if *I* know it! Hands up, an' *lively* too!"

The would-be robber's confederate threw up his arms.

"I'm a Yankee from way back, an' you don't suppose you can get ahead of Jim Simpkins, do you?"

Prairie Ralph's hole in the roof was big enough to let him through.

"Ready down there, Tom?"

"Say the word, guv'nor!"

"*Now!*"

The big ranchman dropped to the floor of the car. At the same time the constable rushed over the remains of the door.

Dead, his head half under the huge safe, blood-

oozing slowly from his left side, lay the messenger. Near him the trampled-out remains of a fuse that led to a square black tin. In the far corner sat a man, his face between his hands—motionless.

Tom covered him instantly with his weapon.

"Surrender in the name of the King!"

The man wearily looked up, pulling off a false moustache as he did so.

Prairie Ralph's face went white.

"*Bill Ellis?*" he said hoarsely.

"Yes, Ralph, that's me."

"But—but, I don't understand, Bill?—Keep back there!" (to the excited crowd of passengers outside). They fled.

"All gone to the bad, Ralph, since the old days. Everything's gone wrong, and I tried—this. I heard you when you called to me in the car. Wish to God I'd turned round!"

Tom listened wide-eyed. That this murderer should know his father so intimately puzzled him.

Prairie Ralph turned to his son.

"Tom, this man saved your life once—years ago, and saved mine later after having killed his—his brother for your mother's sake. I ask you, is there any way that you can manage to be occupied elsewhere while he—he slips away?"

A whirlwind of thoughts chaosed in the policeman's mind. He looked from Prairie Ralph to the other. Then squaring his shoulders: "Guv'nor, you have always told me the truth, and I believe that this man—my prisoner—has done all that you say, but I"—the ranchman's eyes glistened—"I must do my duty, having taken the oath."

"But——" Prairie Ralph began.

"Prisoner, stand up!"

Deftly Tom handcuffed him.

"Ralph, I'm *proud* of your boy, and glad that I had the chance *once* of saving him. My life is finished; his is just beginning. Don't thwart his instincts or his honour. I'm ready" (to the constable).

The engine was again attached to the train, and Simpkins kept excellent guard over Ellis's confederate.

Execrations and curses for Ellis, loud praises for the young constable, ran the length of the train as it moved eastward again in the darkness. A vote of thanks was drawn up by the passengers, addressed to the R.N.W.M.P. Commissioner at Regina.

Stars glittering, Northern Lights shining nebulously, the east-bound express stopped at Regina, three hours late.

Inspector Gibbs was there, as were M'Pherson and Donaldson.

The latter rushed into the train. "And *did* ye get him?" Seeing the manacled prisoner he chuckled. "By Jiminy-Christmus, ye'll get pr'm-o-tion for this—good luck to you!"

Leading his prisoner through the crowd Tom's eyes were full of tears. Ellis saw them. "Brace up, boy! You'll come out *right*."

Prairie Ralph hurried to them. "I'm going on to Brandon, lad. Your mother will be anxious and I——"

"Give Mrs Ralph my kindest thoughts, will you?"

The two men shook hands.

"I will."

"'Board—*all* 'board for Grenfell, Broadview, Moosomin, Brandon, *and* the East!"

Gradually the tail lights of the express glimmered into nothingness.

The body of the messenger, covered by a piece of canvas, lay ghastly in the flickering lamp-light.

"Well done, Dane!"

Tom started at the Inspector's voice. "Thank you, sir," he said huskily, as he took his prisoner away.

M'Pherson had watched the whole scene. "'Tis vera eenterestin'! Aye, unco eenterestin'!"

## IN THE VALLEY OF SHADOW

### I

BITTERLY cold, the north-east wind flung itself viciously across the glaring prairie, sometimes lifting a cloud of snow-dust from its dazzling surfaces, causing the frozen particles to rattle in myriads against the heavy wooden shutters and sloping roof of Prairie Ralph's home. The gale sobbed and moaned, shrieked and yowled, tugging at any loose thing that it could find. The door of the summer stable was ajar.

*Cre-e-ak, Cree-ak, Creeak!* It swung back and forth monotonously, sometimes fetching up against the jamb with a crash that startled the home cattle in their quarters beyond. Overhead a chill pale sun shone faintly through hurrying snow-scud and banks of thin clouds that tumbled and twisted in their mad rush across the heavens.

A vast desolation in white everywhere. Not a sound save for the sssssss—ssssssss of rustling snow.

The long low building seemed deserted and forlorn, as though left to fight the rough elements alone. Faint smoke rose from its chimney, only to be torn away by the wind; it was instantly lost.

Within, old Prairie Ralph and Elsie sat near a roaring fire that droned its life away up the straight black pipe that led by two elbows to the outer air.

She was reading aloud, and his head with its mass of shaggy grey hair rested on the palm of one of his hands.

"And thus they sat in peace," she read quietly, "while the sands in their glass of life passed ceaselessly from the upper bulb to the lower. They mutually understood that the entrance to the Valley of the Shadow of Death lay before them, and that their long course was nearly run."

Prairie Ralph nodded slowly. "That's us too, Elsie girl. A few more years, not many, and we pass the Great Divide."

Silence between them while the wind sobbed and shrieked.

She put the book aside, went over and stiffly knelt beside him, her white face and hair gleaming against the sombreness of his rough coat. He put his arm round her.

"I wonder what it will be like up—up there?" she whispered.

"Well, girl, the Bible promises us many things, and I don't know of anything *mighty* bad that we've done that would keep us from our full share of that harvest."

In the dim light the glow of the fire reflected strongly on their faces, and creeping, dancing shadows leaped, vanished, then appeared elsewhere.

Her eyes became moist. "I hate to leave Tom."

Prairie Ralph sighed deeply. "Aye, it's hard. He's been my right hand, the pride of our lives,

hasn't he? That reminds me! He was hoping for promotion to-morrow!"

"Again?" The mother rose.

"Yes," he laughed, but the sound was old and frail; "yes, 'again'! 'Twill be command of a big post, Calgary or Edmonton or Battleford maybe."

Her face clouded. "Then the lad won't be able to come and see us so often?"

"I'm afraid not." He paused. "But he's got his way to make; we mustn't stand in his path just because we're old and feel kind o' lonely, must we, girl?"

"No-o-o," she answered, turning away with a little sob.

The bent and aged ranchman looked at her with deep tenderness. "Ma," he said softly. "Don't feel badly. Think how proud we ought to be. Why, there's old Whitman at Winnipeg; got millions, yet his son—well, you know—they say that he's——"

"Yes, yes, I know," she interrupted. "We can face the judgment seat and point to the lad as the result of our lives, can't we, Ralph?"

He stood by her like the lover of long gone days, caressing her thin worn hands, smoothing the white hair gently. "We can!"

She began reading again as he slowly filled and lighted his pipe.

"The deep radiant blue of the Mediterranean rolled out beneath their eyes like a vast undulating carpet whose surface was dotted with the delicately tinted sails of the fishermen returning from Capri and rounding the long breakwater. Snatches of song were wafted to them on breezes whose burden was

the scent of orange blossoms and the perfume of myriads of flowers. And as they watched, satiated by the languorous beauty, the dream-like fragrance, there came upon them the old vain regret that the sands were running low and swiftly."

"Can you imagine a place like that?" he asked, puffing slowly.

She looked out, smiling sadly. "*That's* about all we know, boy."

Already the gloom of early winter night was blanketing the storm scene grimly, hiding the short distances, shrouding the out-buildings until they were as but obscure things mantled in clinging white. Around the corners, under low eaves, the wind crept whispering, but against solid bodies it hurled itself with fierce gasps and long minor cadences. With never-relaxing strength the snow battered at the windows, and falling, raised mounds that grew steadily.

He did not answer, and she read on.




## II

"What—time—is—it?"

Sergeant Tom Dane, of the R.N.W.M. Police, turned from the open fire that shot up the wide rough-stone chimney in straight red shafts.

"Nearly nine o'clock, Bill; sun's an hour high." He swung his face back to the fire.

The big lumber camp was empty, and loomed vastly forlorn and lonely. Long rows of bunks yawned from deep shadows and the remnants of



pine-bough bunks showed brown and indistinct. Here and there the sodden drip—drip—drip of snow-water told where the coarse shingled roof leaked, and several cross-beams had given way in the far corner; long icicles stuck downward, glinting blue-grey in the faint sun-sheen. The "horse" on which the grindstone had once been lay broken under a bunk, and the men's roller towel rack stretched its fly-specked length against a swedged log on the wall.

A tiny mouse, thin and mangy, scurried across the floor, stopped as it caught the scent of bacon frying, then darted to Dane's feet. There it stopped and sat up, its little black eyes fixed in the direction from which the scent came.

It, Tom Dane, and Bill Ellis were the only living things in M'Farland's deserted camp, that had long been known as "The Devil's Breeding Place" because more desperate men had emerged, full fledged, from its low, thick doorway than from all the mining camps put together.

"He spent a winter with M'Farland," whispered about in any saloon was enough to ensure the owner of that title great respect and a wide berth.

Tim M'Farland had "popped up out of hell" suddenly; murdered, stole, "jumped" gold claims, and gathered about him the most daring set of men that the Pacific North-West had ever known. He flourished for ten years, then—as one of his crew said afterwards—"Th' pneumony popped him into hell agin!" And Bill Ellis was the man that said it.

Tom Dane crossed the big space to the door stooping, and went out for water.

Grim lowering pines, graceful many-limbed spruce, thick black fir encroached on the clearing, their widely jutting branches motionless in the still of the winter morning.

"Tom, boy, I'm dying!" The weak voice was steady as the Sergeant re-entered.

He put down his bucket and lifted the grizzled head a bit higher on the pillow of branches that had a coat over them. "Where there's life there's hope, Bill," he said quietly, and took a big white hand that came from beneath the grey service blankets.

"No, Tom, my end's in sight, lad, and I've got the fear of God *bad*. It's burning me up, boy. I'm afraid of hell, but I'm more afraid of seein'——" the lips hesitated—"God," they whispered.

Dane was silent. The hand in his quivered, and unconsciously he watched the wee starved mouse as it scampered to and fro, recklessly unafraid.

"Once, Tom,"—Bill Ellis got to his elbow—"once I had everything; a wife, a boy, a home"—he coughed raspingly—"and now look at me! The answer, Tom, is drink, and—and—other things too."

A long pause while the old man gathered breath.

"I was nearest being—saved—from myself—when—when" he coughed again, "I was foreman on—your Dad's—ranch, but I found that I was a-gettin' too fond of—your mother—and—there, boy, don't flinch like that! I—left—didn't—I?" His voice was pathetically eager. "And I—ki-killed—Van' for her name—didn't I?" He was weakly persistent.

Dane's face was haggard in the pale light. "Yes," he answered.

"Ah-h-h!"

The muscles of his face twitching spasmodically, Bill Ellis fell back. "Don't go—go! *Don't* go, Tom!" as Dane started to rise. "Never—mind—breakfast. I won't eat mine—here. The reason—that—I got that red—devil, Ahtanooke to—go—for—you, was that I wan-wanted to—say—something important." He coughed still more harshly, and a slight red-tinged froth appeared on his lips. The Sergeant poured diluted brandy down his throat, and the dimming eyes brightened rapidly.

"You remem-ber when you and Prairie Ralph—P-r-a-i-r-i-e R-a-l-p-h—" he lingered fondly on the letters, "took me when I sh-shot—the 'xpress mess'nger?"

Dane nodded.

"I said then—that—you'd—make—good—Tom, and—and you—ain't—got money, *have you?*"

The dying man peered anxiously into the other's eyes.

"Not much, but enough. I'm promised promotion to-day!"

Dane forgot Ellis, forgot everything save that he was to rise still farther in the Service.

"What's—your Dad's—ranch worth?"

Tom stared at Ellis in astonishment; then, thinking him delirious, he answered carelessly—"Oh, about \$25,000!"

"\$25,000? That all?" Ellis cackled hideously, his voice breaking into shrill sounds.

"Why?" Dane looked at the other in astonishment.

Suddenly the old man's mood changed.

"How long have ye bin here with me?"

"Three days."

"My God!" Ellis tried to spring up, but tumbled in a heap.

"To-mor—to-mor-row—" he gurgled.

"Yes, to-morrow—what?" The Sergeant covered him up again.

Something in Ellis's eyes made him sit down at the bunkside.

"They—you—the Police 'll—be—after me an'——"

"You're off your head a bit, Bill; nobody's after you. Didn't I come here to help you?"

"I—I—I know—I know," Ellis stuttered feebly, but *they* know that—I—killed—Tim M'Farland; d'ye see?"

Dane laughed. "Nonsense!" he said heartily. "Tim died of pneumonia, everybody knows *that*——!"

"So—so he did, but he was gettin' better—at—first, Tom—an'—an' then I—I lugged him out—in—the cold an' snow one night—after th' men—had—had gone, an' he took wuss—right—away—an' cashed in pretty—quick!"

The uniformed man drew back.

"I guess whut ye're agoin'—ter—ask! I done—done it incause—incause—" his eyes grew fiercely bright—"I wanted ye an' Ralph an' yer Ma ter have it—it all,—*all*!"

"All?" Dane couldn't understand.

The dying man nodded,—"Come closer; 'bout \$250,000 in dust an' gold coin! Thar!"

The eagerly triumphant light in his eyes faded out, and his lips quivered like those of a hurt child.

"Ain't—ye—glad?" he asked slowly.

Dane did not answer. He thought awhile. \$250,000! And Ellis dying alone with him far in the grim wilderness.

"Time's agoin'—fer—me—Tom; jest let—let me talk—a—few—minits, an' Bill Ellis—Bill Ellis 'll quit—fer—good. Higher my head, Tom."

A pause.

"Dunno's ye bin—told—boy, but—I—I used ter be mighty—fond of—of—your Ma. That's what Ralph meant the night ye—'rested—me—me in the 'xpress car, and I fixed up yer head once. Oh, hell, to have them days back again!" His eyes filled with tears. "Howsomever, that's all done—done with. Well, I got in with—with Tim. He trusted me—where his 'stuff' was—was hid, and I've—had my knife many's th' time to cut his damned liver out, but I was afraid—of—of the others."

Ellis was rushing on through the words, his voice growing fainter and fainter.

"Then my chance come, and—and he's dead. That's three year ago, and I—ain't—never—touched the money—jest gone sometimes to see if it was there. I've been waitin' till I was on the edge of Jumpin'-off Creek to tell ye, because—I didn't think ye'd take it unless I was adyin'." He stopped, choked by coughing. Waving Tom's hand away—"It's under a big p'inted rock to the head of the Bear Cub Gulch right where—the—the—" he jerked at his chest and throat—"Time to finish, God or devil, an' I'm with ye," he whispered—"Right where a spring comes out on the right-hand side by a leanin' pine. Ye—ye—ye can't miss it, Tom."

Take it fur yer Ma, and Ralph, and git—git out of this hell-built land afore it nabs ye."

His face went grey.

"Say yes, Tom! Say yes! Lemme take it with me—on—my—last—prospectin'—trip—that that—devil's money—will—do—good—an'—give—give—give happi-ness yet. Most of—of it—come—from men he—murdered, so—ye—can't—give—it—back—to—'em." A hoarse gasp. "Say yes—comin' now, comin'—say ye——"

Ellis had started on his last prospecting trip.

Dane looked at the pain-drawn face, that showed traces of birth and education still.

"What a life, and what a death," he murmured. "Poor old Bill!"

Slowly he went outside.

Wan and far away a pasty-coloured sun feebly shone, and the intense silence was unbroken. Mass on mass the clustered forest trunks rose on the foothills until their confirmation was lost in blurred dark stains high up against the bare snow.

\$250,000!

Dane started as he remembered. He filled his pipe and sat on a log, one leg swinging. "With that we could live East—anywhere," he whispered. "Mother's getting old for Canada, and dad's not much use to himself when the cold sets in."

His eyes wandered from mountain peak to peak, as though seeking an answer from them. Not a movement, not a sound.

With an old pickaxe and a peavie he dug a hole—after having thawed the earth with a fire—and buried the emaciated old form. Then, looking round as

though some one might hear him, he knelt and said the Lord's Prayer.

"Mother taught me that, and it's all I know, Bill. It goes with you for her sake."

He packed his load, put on his snowshoes, looked about him once more, still hesitating what he should do, when a great shadow flitted over his head.

Noiselessly the magnificent white owl lighted on the peak of the camp not ten feet from him, its glorious plumage shining in the cold light, its great black eyes staring into his.

Moments passed, neither bird nor man stirring. Then the owl gave a soft *Hoo!* spread the long velvety pinions, and vanished as mysteriously as it had come.

Dane shook himself as though from a dream and strode to the north-east, his snowshoes clacking sharply.

He had decided.

"Begin where you stopped reading to me last night, Elsie," Ralph said, as he slowly let himself into his big chair.

"Gleaming with myriad lights, Naples twinkled brilliantly as though reflecting a small part of the bright scintillating heavens. A breeze whispered softly through the acacias and roses, causing their leaves to patter faintly. In the harbour the search-lights of war vessels darted to and fro with inquiring, steel-like shafts. And from above it all a mellowed, radiant moon looked down."

"Maybe Tom'll be able to see all those things if we can't, Ralph?" the mother said wistfully.

"I hope so, girl. Curious, I've been thinking about Tom all day to-day. I suppose it's because he's got his promotion."

She read on far into the quiet night while he dozed.

## THE TURNING

CONSTABLE RYERSON asked Headquarters to shift him to the Spirit River outpost of the Mounted Police. Waiting orders to proceed thither, he wandered around Hazelton. Everything was orderly, no excitement of any kind.

One hot July day he walked up to the little cabin at the foot of the Sabine Range.

"Gone!" he muttered as he reached it.

Empty and forlorn the log-house stood, the shaky door leaning outwards on one hinge, the old rags that were once stop-gaps in broken panes dragging over the sills of the windows, faded and tattered. Blackberry vines clustered over the doorway; porcupines had gnawed the timbers almost through in search of the salty taste they craved. He went in. It was lonely, with the sunlight streaming through niches and cracks. The bunk was a roosting place for birds, and they had built a nest in one corner.

The silence was profound; only the humming and buzzing flight of flies and wasps disturbed it. A bit of white caught his eyes under the broken-down table. He picked the thing up carelessly, for want of something better to do; then he looked closely.

"A bit of ribbon, just a bit of ribbon!" and he laughed mirthlessly. "Fool, fool, fool!"

He turned abruptly and walked out, looking straight ahead, and went back to the station.

"What ails you, Tim?" Sergeant Nicholls asked; "ain't took a mite with the heat?"

"No," the other answered shortly. "Any news?"

"Here's a letter f'om Regina fur ye. Orders, I guess."

Ryerson jerked it out of his hand.

"Transferred, thank heaven!"

"I don't see what you're so almighty tickled 'bout it fur," his superior said reproachfully. "Ye couldn't hev' an easier job; hain't been nawthin' doin' since we thought we'd nabbed English Jack!"

"Oh, shut up, man. I'm tired of it here—want a change!"

Nicholls was hurt; both he and his dignity were hurt.

"Hev' it your own way, young feller; but mind me, you won't hev' such a snap as this at Spirit River! Thar's a tough crowd in that locality!" He stamped out, growling about "some men being dam' fools!"

After supper Ryerson got his kit ready to start. Of a sudden he began hunting through the limited number of pockets the Service allows. Then he called down the ladder-way, "Fred! Hello, Fred!"

"Whut?"

"D'you see my knife—th' long one?"

"No, hain't!" a fellow policeman shouted back.

Ryerson searched again. He pulled something

from the hip-pocket of his trousers. It was a soiled and yellow thing.

"Devil take it, can't I quit this?" He flung the bit of ribbon out of the window into the night and went on with his preparations. Everything ready, he went below for a last smoke with the "boys." The five that numbered Hazelton Station chatted together.

"Mike Flannigan's givin' a dance tērmorrer night! There'll be some fun," Fred Larkin announced.

The sergeant pondered for several moments. "You and Dinny ken go," he said; then, slowly, with an air of judicial gravity, "th' rest of us'll keep the town quiet."

Then silence, broken only by the puffs of pipes and the rapturously indrawn breaths and loud exhaling of Dinny, who had somewhere got hold of a really good "cee-gar."

The rhythmic rat-a-plat, rat-a-plat of a horse's feet on the red dusty road came to them then.

"Sounds like Albert Jenkins from Babine!"

Nearer and nearer, as the five waited; then a plud—plud—plod!

"Who-a, hoss!"

A man in the police brown-canvas uniform came in. "How'dy, boys? G'night to ye!"

The sergeant glanced round proudly. "I said as how it was Albert!"

"I've got rush orders for you, Tim!" The newcomer hauled off his gauntlets, unbuttoned his jacket. "Thar y'are; a trifle mussed, but I guess you kin read!"

Ryerson took the long envelope, ran his finger

along the gummed edge, and read. He stared at the paper in his hands.

"Here, Nicholls, read that."

The sergeant took it gingerly. "This must be mighty important," he thought, cleared his throat apologetically. "'Constable Ryerson, transferred to Spirit River, will proceed there at once in disguise, carrying side-arms under his shirt. The man called English Jack is encamped a mile up from the settlement, on the left-hand side of the river. Known as William Richards. You, Constable Ryerson, are hereby authorised to take said English Jack, known at Spirit River as William Richards, dead or alive. (Signed) Berry, Commissioner, R.N.W.M.P.' That's all." The sergeant looked at Ryerson enviously. "Now, Tim, you've got your work cut out fur ye! It'll mean 'stripes,' sure!"

"Wisht I had the chanst!" Dinny muttered.

Ryerson said nothing; went upstairs again, changed his uniform for an old pair of overalls, a scarlet silk shirt, old lumberman's boots, and rough-and-ready felt hat that pulled well down over his eyes. He plastered a long moustache on his smooth upper lip, soiled his cheeks with burnt cork and grease.

"Never know ye in th' world!" The policemen shouted and roared with laughter when he went down again.

Silent, he went to the stables and threw an old cowboy saddle over "Jim." It had no holsters, no blanket straps, nothing—only the bare leather, the heavy stirrups, and rough girth.

"Good-night, boys, by-by; look out for my kit!" and he was gone down the road.

"Queer feller, Tim; by G——, he's got a chanst fur 'stripes' alright—alright!" and Dinny sucked viciously at the butt of his "cee-gar."

Ryerson reached Spirit River late the next afternoon, and stopped at the "Four Aces" hotel. The place was crowded with miners, gamblers, roustabouts, and criminals of all sorts.

"Hello, stranger!"

"Hello, yersel'!" Ryerson went up to the bar.

"Come, boys, a drink all round on me."

The crowd tumbled up eagerly.

"Say, you're alright!" they shouted, and drank.

"What's yu're lay, pard?" A small man edged near Ryerson.

"Anythin' that turns up," the latter answered.

The little man leered at him. "Draw it mild, pard, draw it mild." He leant over, his lips brushing the constable's ear. "Yu're a 'mounter'!" (This is the nickname for the members of the Mounted Police.)

Ryerson's face was a blank. "Ye don't say?"

"Shucks, man, ef yu' wants ter be deesguised, don't wear yu'r gun harness under a silk shirt that kin be looked right through!"

Ryerson watched him.

"Now, ef I says the word, yo'll be in a hot mess in about one minute! 'Mounsters' ain't 'lowed in 'yar, not lonesome ones, anyway!"

The constable put his hands behind his back, so that he might reach his revolvers quickly if the worst happened.

"Don't do it, pard, don't do it! Ther' ain't no use in bustin' up this 'ere ho-tel, besides gettin' a few pills into ye, fur luck. We can dicker a mite, I raickon; come outside."

Ryerson followed him out into the darkness, down the road, round to the left, up a short steep hill that led to a hut, perched on the edge of the bank.

"Come in, come in, pard, an' talk it over!"

Ryerson had hitched his revolvers to a convenient position during the walk, and torn two holes in the silk shirt at their butts. He followed. "Maybe I'll get some information," he muttered, as he went in. Another man was there, building up the fire on the hearth-stone.

"Brought a 'mounter,' Ellis." The little man waved his hand genially. "'Mounter,' me friend Ellis, Ellis—'Mounter,' introdudle! That's whut you call it, ain't it?"

The other peered at Ryerson in the dim light. "It's alright, Nik."

"Cert, my boy. Mounter an' me's goin' to dicker. Drink?" he offered some whisky to the constable, of the colour of oil.

"Guess not; now look here, Nik, or whatever your name is, I'm no 'mounter'——"

"Chuck it," the little man interrupted. "What's the use o' lyin' when I treated ye hon'able?"

Ryerson looked round, cleverly imitating fear. "I done for a 'mounter' terday, that skunk Ryerson, an' I collected his guns; don't s'pose I'm going ter carry 'em open, do ye?"

"Well, I'm 'blamed!" The two stared at him with respect.

"Nuggets and sand! But I was way off, that time!" The little man was apologetic; then he went on rapidly, "Yu're the fellow fur some fun then! We're goin' up ter clean out Bill Richards to-night! The low-down fool's bin cheatin' us hyar at Spirit River long enuff with his card-fingerin'; an' the gal with him, too! She doped Andy Douglas's drink t'other night, an' they tuk every 'red' he had, damn 'em."

"Richards!" the constable whispered; "why that's English——"

"Whut?" Nik asked solicitously, for he had a great reverence for the man that "did" a "mounter," and had his weapons to prove it.

"Nawthin'; thought the name was familiar."

"We hearn there was a 'mounter' comin' f'om Hazelton termorrer, an' there's four o' our crowd gone up th' trail to stop him till we gets the bodies hid, and things cleaned up."

"What luck," Ryerson thought, "that I came by the short cut!"

"How you goin' ter get at him?" he asked, thinking of the girl.

"Easy! Thar's a bunch up thar now, playin'—just a bluff, ye see; they're losin' their money so's to blind 'em till we gets there. It'll be a fine clean-up, sure!" The little man chuckled and rubbed his hands, one over the other, their rough skin almost grating in the silence.

"Now what?" Ryerson could see no way to save her, and to take English Jack alive, for that meant far more than his dead body, especially as his death would not be his, Ryerson's, doing.

"'Bout time ter start. Come on, stranger!"

Now that the unknown had admitted killing a policeman, Nik had no hesitation in asking him to join the "fun." The small man led the way, the constable next, Ellis in the rear.

They plodded on in silence, Ryerson racking his brain for some way, *some way* to save the woman and take his man. The trail led by the river, whose roaring echoes prevented conversation. White and foaming in the starlight, it tumbled past them with gigantic splashings that reverberated clearly in the black pines beyond. They stopped on a rise.

"Glad ye comed." Nik turned back, as he lighted his stubby pipe. "Ef ye hadn't, I'd known ye wuz a liar, an' things 'ud been lively atween me an' you an Ellis, eh pard?"

"You bet," the last man answered, shouting to make himself heard above the noise of the waters. They went on, now along alder ravines where the trail was muddy, and water squashed thickly from beneath their feet; then across hardwood ridges, the light breeze gently whispering in the masses of leaves.

Nik put his pipe into his pocket. "P'utty near thar," he said to the others.

The sound of laughter and shouts penetrated the forest darkness then; the cabin stood before them, ablaze with lights, shadows of many men hovering about the door, passing in and out.

"Everything right?" the little man asked a great figure that stood by the corner of the logs.

"Yep!"

Ryerson was dazzled by the yellow glare of many candles. As his eyes became accustomed to the light he saw English Jack dealing faro, and the girl drawing whisky from a gallon jar. She looked up, hearing the three enter, and her gaze focussed on Ryerson. Puzzled she seemed for an instant, then she started for English Jack. Unnoticed Ryerson shook his head quickly, and gave the safety sign, well known in the North-west—namely, the four fingers of the left hand close together, thumb drawn over the palm. She hesitated, and he picked his way towards her.

"Gimme a drink," he said, roughly and loudly, for several men were watching him.

As she poured the liquor he leaned close to her: "Who am I, that you're afraid?"

"Ryerson," she whispered back. "Don't I know them eyes? haven't I thought—what am I sayin'?" She spilled the whisky recklessly.

"Tell Jack he's got ter stand by; this crowd's here to clean ye out!"

"You after him?" She fumbled with the spigot to hide her agitation.

"Yes, but I can't take him to-night; you an' me's square, ye know—this is fair!"

"I know, I know," she muttered.

The crowd laughed and talked loudly.

"My pot, gents!" English Jack's voice sounded clear and strong over the medley of noises.

"Damn yu, yes! Go on an' deal!"

Again the monotonous click—brrrr-rp, as the cards were dealt one by one.

He forgot his duty, his work, everything. "Annie!"

She turned the full blaze of her black eyes on him.  
"I——"

"Sssh!" she hissed, "so do I!" She dropped the gallon, went over to English Jack, and whispered.

"Go on—deal!" The crowd were suspicious, and the little man that waited by the door was uneasy.

She had told Jack all, yet his face was emotionless as he dealt. Cautiously, though, he happened to strike the flap of his revolver holster with his elbow.

"Now, boys——" the little man shouted.

"Halt, you!"

The men glowered at the brace of muzzles that stared at them.

Ryerson ran his eyes over the group. "In the name of the law, I order you out, I'm Constable Ryerson, of the police!"

English Jack had his weapon on the crowd, too, and they fidgeted.

"You rotten liar!" Nik said from near the door.

Ryerson paid no attention. "Out ye go! Thar's ten constables comin' by daylight—ye'd best behave!" He lied well.

One by one they turned their backs and trooped away, dispersing in the darkness. For they were cowards at heart—it only needed "bluff" to bring it out.

"Thar! I've saved you a cleanin' out." He turned, laying his weapons on the table, and looked into English Jack's revolver.

"So you're goin' ter get me, are you?"

"Jack, Jack, he saved our lives to-night!"

"Shut up, An'; saved us so that he could take me; but I ain't willin'—yet!"

From the corners of his eyes Ryerson saw the girl's face grow stony hard, the black eyes flashing, the lips compressed in a rigid line.

"I ain't ready to be took," English Jack sneered. I ain't a-goin, ter shoot ye, 'cause that crowd o' children 'ud be back, an' make it warm for us; now that we got their 'dough'; but I'm a-goin' to vamoose, sonny, an' I'll take these 'yar weapons—they mought come handy!" He reached over, drew Ryerson's revolvers to himself, and stuck them in his belt. "So long, 'mounter'!" He started for the door.

"Jack, Jack, what'll I do?"

The man turned for an instant—"Meet me—you know where we decided!" and disappeared in the darkness.

"Ryerson," the girl whispered, "God bless ye fur savin' us!" She approached slowly, the flickering candles lighting her eyes with rare glow.

The constable fought himself, seeing the full, tall figure, the pallid face, the masses of black hair.

"Keep back," he whispered angrily. "This is the first time he's played me wrong. I did it fur you, but I'll get him the next time!" He swung on his heel.

"I'll help!" she said, as he vanished into the shades of the night.



## "SQUARE"

AFTER the Taylor incident English Jack and Annie moved. Always on the watch, they never stayed in one place long. Spring found them down near Hazelton, at the foot of the Sabine Range. They had a bit of a shanty that served as gambling "parlour" and bar. Jack flipped the pasteboards, and the girl tended the liquor end of the partnership.

One night when the crowd had gone, the last of their drunken shouts echoing up the wide trail, he locked the door carefully.

"Say, An', I'm oneasy these days." He sat wearily on a whisky keg.

"Haven't heard anythin', hev' ye?" Rings seem to appear round her black eyes.

"Nope; but I'm wonderin' if that Ryerson ever told."

"I'll bet he didn't. Jack, that feller was straight goods; he knew when his cards was played an' called."

"D'you remember what he said when you seen him in th' bush? 'Pears I can't think to-night."

Her cheeks paled slightly. "He said—said that

he wouldn't tell, but that he'd get you for the Black Dan job yet!"

"Aye, that was it, I 'member now: get—me—fur th'—Black—Dan—job—eh? Wall, he's welcome ter try, an' fur' th'—Taylor—racket too!"

"Ssh, lad, don't say them things loud!" Her eyes travelled swiftly, in half expectation, to the door.

"They ain't nobody down hyar that knows us; why since I growed th' beard I walked into th' Mounted P'lice place at Hazelton an' seed a drawin' o' myself on th' wall!" He laughed with the same old merry sound.

"Don't, Jack-lad; it makes me skeared; what's I to do w'out ye?"

He caught her, and kissed the pale face roughly, shaking down the quantities of long black hair. "God, girl," he muttered, "I love ye a heap! That's all that saved me havin' another murder in self-defence on my list—I'm meanin' Ryerson!"

She drew away, tidying herself by the light of the guttering candles in the few inches of mirror that was braced up on two nails. "He treated me right, Jack," she answered, her mouth full of hairpins.

"Better'n he'll treat me if he ever gets the 'drop'! I hearn as how he'd bin chucked from the Force fur that business."

"No? Well, that's too bad; I'm sorry, sure!"

"Rather see him stay in it and nab me, eh?"

She turned quickly. "You blamed fool, what you talkin' 'bout?"

"Danged if I know," he answered, resting his chin on his hands—"danged if I know."

The air in the cabin was suffocatingly close, reeking with the fumes of alcohol, turbid with the stale, musty stench of pipes and bad tobacco.

He opened the door. Like an invisible wave the warm night air flowed in, laden with the ozone of the forests, deep burdened with the woody smells of the wilderness. From a little valley the tumbling sound of waters came, the liquid plashing murmuring down there in the darkness.

"Listen, gal!" She went to him, and together they stood. "D'ye hear um?"

From far away came the dainty *Whip-poor-will*, *Whip-poor-will* call.

"Them bu'ds, they're happy," she whispered, "ain't they?" looking up at him. His thin face quivered.

"A'n't ye happy, An'?"

She laughed, a little harshly, pulling away. "Drink an' gamble, gamble an' drink, an'—kill!" she whispered, almost to herself. Then—

"Why don't y' give it up, lad? Let's go away, far away to a civ'lised country, where a woman has a chance beside dealin' out liquor." She tried to soften her voice, but there was a despairing, metallic ring to it that she could not hide. He shook all over, breathing faster.

"I will, An', I'll do it yet fur ye! Hark! Back quick!"

The revöler seem to grow into his hand from nothingness. It was the work of but an instant to barricade the door; slats were always ready for the purpose. The girl crouched behind the whisky keg; the lights were out; everything quiet. Then

cautious steps outside. She heard Jack draw a deep breath. *Tap-tap, tap-tap-tap*, on the door. *Tap-tap, tap-tap-tap*. Then, "Jack, b'y," the hissing whisper came through the crack.

"Hell!" He pulled the slats away rapidly, yet without unnecessary noise.

"What you scarin'—I mean, what you want, Bill, at this time o' night?"

"What yoh barricaded foh, laik a distillery in ol' Kaintuck?" A burly, massive individual stalked in. English Jack lighted up.

"Hello, Ho-ney." The newcomer tried to chuck the girl under the chin.

"None o' that, Bill; ye know *me*! They looked at each other steadily.

"Ah raicken ah do, Jack—that's fur why ah'm hyah!" He turned away from Annie.

"Say, son, thar's a nice thing on t'night. Are you in?"

"What's the game?"

Bill Feathertoning, or "Feathers" as he was called for short, leaned over, first taking a huge chew from a black plug.

"That's not the question! Are—you—in?"

English Jack hesitated, strode over to the keg, filled a tumbler, and swallowed the contents.

"Sure!"

"That's business. Neow yeou see"—neither noticed the girl creep behind them, listening—"th' Paymaster left Simpson yestahday mohnin'; he'll fetch th' lower end o' Flynn's Gulch by daylight, an' I've heard on good—ah say *good*—othority, that he's bringin' the Company's mail bags! Thar'll be a

draft er two in 'um, shoh. Neow, yeou an' me an' a couple of others 'll wait by that bush o' spruce, just where th' trail swings inter th' gulch, an' nab 'um! Ain't that shoh fine?"

"There'll be some shootin'," English Jack said reflectingly.

"Damn little, 'cept f'om our side. Thar h'aint bin a hold up fur so long, they'll be kurless, shoh 'nuff!"

"I'll go."

"I knowed ye would, Jack! Meet us over thar by Slim Thomson's just afore light. By-by!" He vanished.

"That's what ye call givin' it up, lad?" The girl burst out crying. Vainly he tried to comfort her.

"Taint nawthin', An'; I'll get some swag, an' we'll clear out for good!"

"More killin'!" she sobbed — "more killin'!" Then she thrust him away savagely. "I've lived wi' ye, I've worked fur ye, I love ye, English Jack, an' I will yet, but mind the time I quit!" She darted out into the night.

"An'!" he called—"An'!" but no answer came.

The whip-poor-wills were silent; here and there an owl hooted mournfully.

"No signs o' light yet," he muttered, and went in to get ready.

He belted on his cartridges, cleaned and oiled the "44," shoved a piece of cheese, some dry bread, and a small bottle in his pocket; then he went to the door again.

"An'!"—"An'!" The forest seemed quiet as the grave. "She'll get over it when I brings back

the swag!" And he slipped off down the trail, his mocassined feet making no sound.

Soon the girl came back and threw herself on the bunk, crying bitterly. "He don't love me. He'd give it up if he did. Oh, mother, mammie, if I was only home again!"

She sat up dry-eyed, and began talking to herself. "I gave up everythin' fur him, an' he's a plain murderer! Now, Ryerson was a man, I saw it in his face, an' I'm glad, glad, *glad* ter hav' done one good thing in my life in savin' him!"

She stood up, went to the door, and leant in the entrance as full daylight broadened over the eastern horizon. In roseate and purple hues the night clouds backed away sullenly. Like veils of gauze the mists rose into the heavens, and were at once tinged in changing colours. Violet, straw, and dark blue, the skies were streaked and dashed with the brilliant rays of the sun that lifted its burning circle over the forest line, far, far away.

Long the girl stood there watching, her face bathed in the glow, her eyes aflame with the reflection. She turned to go in.

"Well?"

A start of fear at the voice. A man's figure entered slowly after her. "Ryerson!" she whispered.

"The same!"

She looked at him, scarce believing her eyes, yet there was the unpleasantly familiar police uniform, the glaring brass buttons, the sombrero—everything, and still more familiar, the steady look in the deep grey eyes.

"Don't worry, girl; I ain't a-goin' ter hurt ye!"

"No," she muttered against her will; "tain't in ye to do it!"

With him came the old scenes. She saw Taylor being carried out and roughly buried. "What ye goin' ter do?"

"Same old question!" and he laughed, staring at her. "D'y' remember askin' me that once afore?" He laughed again.

She put out her hands instinctively.

"Don't," she whispered—"don't."

"I'll tell ye what I'm here for."

He sat on the keg. Somehow she disliked his doing it. He was silent for a few moments watching her, while the sun climbed into the clear heavens, piercing the dinginess of the cabin with its mellow rays. She felt a flush come to her cheeks; she was embarrassed before these grey eyes, even in her fear for Jack, that had become a habit.

"You did me a good turn onct; saved my life; nar I'm hyar because I"—he stammered awkwardly—"ter square it!" he finished.

The stillness was absolute. He picked up a bit of wood and shivered it between his fingers. "You an' him thought I'd been kicked outer th' Force, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"That was all a game from headquarters, so's ter let me catch him!"

"Oh-h!" She swayed as she stood.

Ryerson started towards her, then he sat fast by an effort. "Th' boys from the Station know all about to-night's job!"

She winced.

"An' they nipped all but two—Feathers and Jack—in the act. They got Jack up near Wolf's Head, but they ain't sure he's the man they want. Some of 'em says it's English Jack, from Glenora. They told me where the cabin was, an' so I thought I'd come up."

"It's all over; he's finished this trip."

Low though the girl's words were, Ryerson heard. "Do as I tells ye, an' it ain't!"

She stared at him, at a loss to understand.

"What d'yer mean?"

Even then she reckoned his price.

"I means that you saved my life onct, an' I'm a-goin' to save his fur ye!"

The last two words were spoken with a distinct effort.

At last she understood him, and her woman's heart felt keenly the desire of a man to "square."

"Tell me," she begged.

"They'll be hyar purty quick, 'cause I told 'em to bring him ter me, an' that I'd swear ter English Jack when I sees him."

"What'll I do?"

"Keep st—Sssh! Steady, now!"

The trampling of men and horses sounded in the quiet morning air. Ryerson lighted his pipe unconcernedly. The girl stood where she was, white, but calm.

"Got here all right, Tim?" the sergeant asked, entering the cabin with heavy tread, spurs tinkling.

"Sure; where's the feller ye call English Jack? By G——! if it's him, I'll know him, an' we'll

dose him about twenty years, or a piece of rope!"

"Bring him in," the sergeant called.

An instant's pause, a curse or two, and the shuffle of feet. English Jack flinched when he saw Ryerson. Something in the grey eyes made him silent, and he stood quiet.

The constable looked him up and down. "No more English Jack than I am!" he said then curtly.

The man started, and clenched his hands.

"Damn to it!" the sergeant swore. "You sure?"

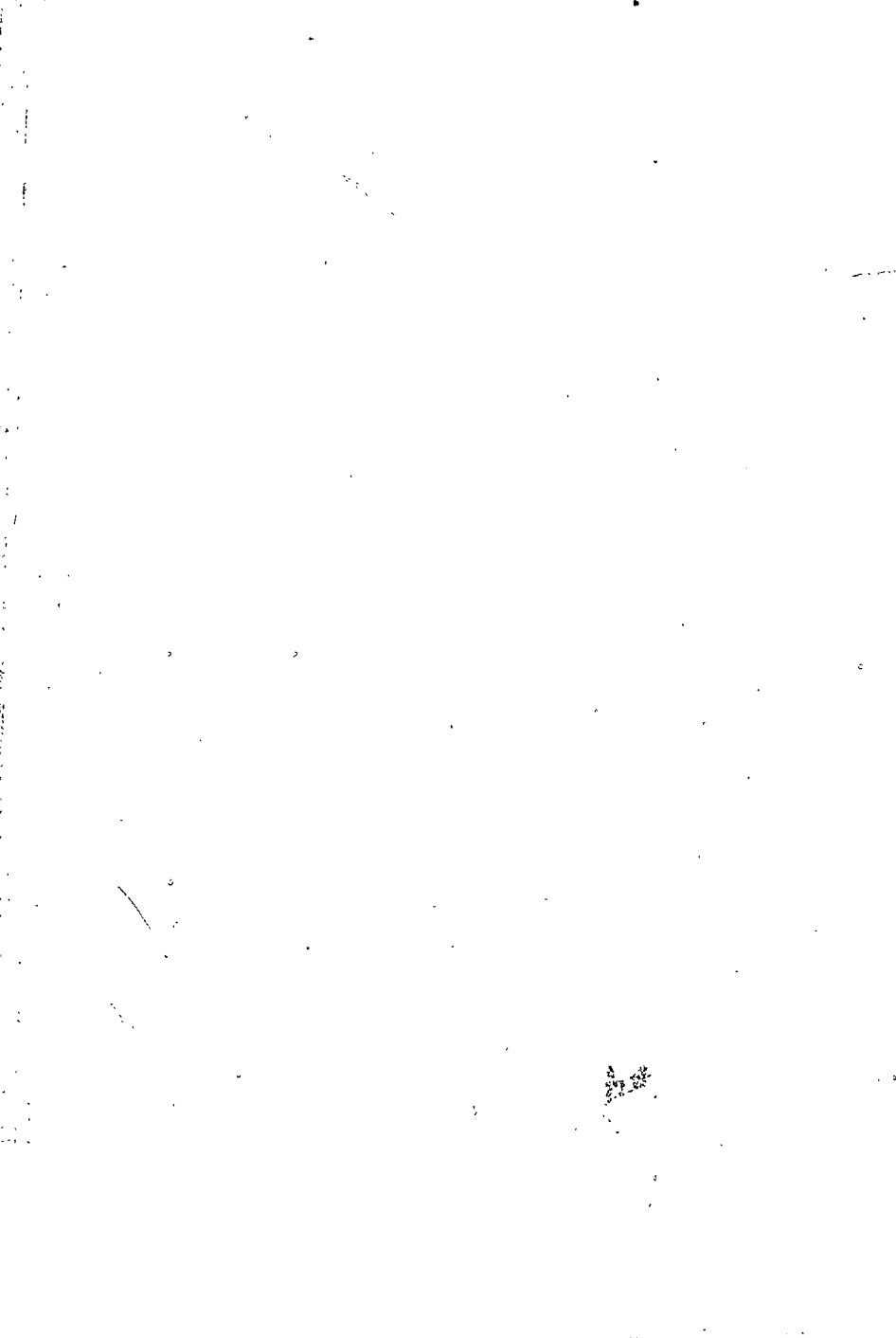
"Yes, Nicholls—yes; didn't I see English Jack shoot Taylor? This ain't the man!"

The other constables cursed. "All this work for nawthing."

They unlocked English Jack's handcuffs.

"You better be glad you ain't the man we want!" Sergeant Nicholls grumbled as he swung on his heel. "Come on, boys; no use stayin' here."

English Jack crowded back to the wall, staring at Ryerson as he passed out with the others. The latter paid no attention to him, but whispered to the girl as he went by: "We're square!"



## THE QUEEN OF THE PACK

DAYS and weeks had come and gone since Ryerson lost English Jack at Spirit River. News filtered to the station at Hazelton that the man was operating at the old tricks, cards, over near Fort Grahame. From there the police heard of him again as concerned in a bad fight at Fraser's Lake; they lost him there again.

"Cuss it all!" Dinny said, one hot night as the same crowd, Sergeant Nicholls, Ryerson, Fred Blant, Dick Sturges and he, sat outside the station, trying to keep cool. "Where in blazes 'd that English Jack get to?"

No one answered; Ryerson shifted his position on the grass.

"Here's orders comin' near every week: 'We hear English Jack is in your neighbourhood, etcetera,' an' not a sign of him; drat it, the son-of-a-gun has more luck than a decent deservin' man has! Most of it's that gal he lugs round with him; she's Queen of the Pack, I hears 'em say, them that has seen her." He turned to Ryerson. "Say, Timmie, get a mash on it, if ye can; make her tell somethin'!"

"Keep still, you fool!" Ryerson flung the words

savagely before he could control himself, and walked away.

Dinny rolled over on the sun-baked ground and shouted with laughter, the sound echoing away across the road in the sultry darkness. "I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated, when he was able to speak.

"What were ye thinkin'?" The Sergeant was deeply interested, being of a curious disposition.

Dinny liked the Sergeant, but he knew the latter's propensities for forwarding all news to Headquarters—in hopes of a commission—therefore he was silent.

"I was wonderin' how Tim 'ud do as a spy."

"Wouldn't do 't all, he's too honest," the Sergeant answered gruffly; for Ryerson was his "boy." "Didn't English Jack get away from him the time he played spy at Spirit River?"

"Yes, that's true, but he let——" Dinny stopped suddenly.

"Let what?"

"Let hisself be drawed in. Ye'r right, Nicholls; Ryerson's too much of a man ter be a spy!"

The air was soggy, murky in its promise of rain, and the four sat, almost panting with the heat. No star was visible in the heavens. Great blotches of cloud were everywhere, seemingly motionless.

"It'll be cool arter this," Nicholls said, and went into the station. The other three followed.

Through the open windows they heard the first rustling of the wind in the trees. Zephyr-like and dainty it stirred the leaves, moving among them with caressing sweetness. Then harder and harder; shuffling the limbs of the forest to and fro violently;

hurling weak off-shoots to the ground, angrily tugging at the bigger branches that resisted, finally sweeping along with droning murmur, hesitation almost, between the puffs.

"She's goin' ter be a snorter," Dinny said, and sat himself in the far corner of the house. Dinny was not fond of thunderstorms.

Then the rain; single huge drops that struck heavily at first, followed by a drowning downpour, came. In hissing, soaking sheets the water fell, the strength of the drops causing a haze to rise from the ground.

"Wonder whar Ryerson went?" the Sergeant shouted above the noise.

Ryerson was on his way back to the station when the storm caught him. He turned his collar up, and picked his way along by the spurts of flaming, zig-zagging fire that darted venomously from the inky-hued skies. Of a sudden a figure rushed up to him; he could just see it standing there.

"Ryerson!" came a woman's voice—a voice that he had heard when alone, a voice that he even—yes, he dared say it to himself—wished for.

"Annie?"

"Aye, Annie! D'ye want to catch *him*?"

He forgot his duty for an instant, and tried to catch her.

"D'ye want him?"

"Yes," he answered gruffly. "You tell me where I can git him!"

"He's beaten me; he's cursed me when I refused ter dope the whisky; he says I'm thinking——"

— "Never mind all that!" Ryerson steeled himself

once and for all. The girl crept close to him in the darkness.

By the intermittent gleams he saw her face. It was white, and the black eyes burned at him.

"T'night," she called in his ear, "come to Ben Lounsbery's shack; ye know it? Over Dan Lick's fence, and down by the brook."

"I know," he answered. "Annie!" But she was gone.

He hurried to the station, and went in, dripping, water streaming from his feet, seeking its tortuous way across the floor boards.

"Dinny!" Ryerson shook as though of ague.

"What, lad, what is it?" Dinny followed Ryerson upstairs.

"Say, Dinny, I've got news o' English Jack!"

Dinny was keen at once.

"Dinny, I've got nobody in the world to trust; will ye stand by me?"

"Sartin', Tim! Count on me."

They shook hands while the thunder bellowed and roared.

"I'm wishin' for the girl, Dinny. I——"

"I guessed it when ye said, 'Shut up, ye fool!'" Dinny's voice was sympathetic, and Ryerson hurried on.

"I've swore ter take English Jack! He beats her, man!—beats her!"

Ryerson controlled himself by an effort. "She's told me where he is; will ye go with me? I'll marry her arterwards, I swear it!"

Dinny hesitated, and Ryerson saw. "Don't, then! I'll go alone!"

The world of sadness in his voice struck an answering chord. "I'll go too." Dinny squared his shoulders. "Come on."

Together they went out into the night. The rain had ceased; only distant grumblings told of a thunderstorm.

They climbed Dan Lick's fence and came to the shack. A vague, yellow gleam spluttered at them from the window as they approached.

"I arrest you in the name o' the law!" Ryerson shouted, as he opened the door.

Two figures faced him; the girl and English Jack. The latter threw up his hands.

"Ye've got him," Dinny whispered from the rear.

"Say, Ryerson, for I knows yer name well, will ye give a feller the chanst to die out? I'm tired o' it all; don't want ter put in twenty year hard labour, or wuss!"

Ryerson thought of the girl, longed for her. "He would be safe, dead," he muttered.

"Aye," and he lowered his weapon that covered English Jack.

With a swift motion the outlaw drew his own weapon. "She's wantin' ye, but ye shan't hev her!"

A sharp report; the girl lay on the ground, inert.

"She loves ye, an' I know it; but I'll take the rope afore ye have her!" English Jack threw down his revolver. "Thar, curse ye, shoot!"

Ryerson's face grew hard as flint. "Aye," he said then calmly, "I will!" He raised the weapon. English Jack faced him unflinchingly.

"Y'ur duty, man, y'ur duty comes fust!" Dinny said, and struck up his arm. The gun exploded

harmlessly ; Ryerson threw it from him and leaped to the girl.

"Annie!—Annie!" he whispered. She opened the great black eyes for an instant.

"I loved you, Ryerson,—ever—since—ye treated me like a man! I—hain't known no man afore; I——" She gurgled and gasped, then lay quiet in his arms.

"We've got you, English-Jack, an' you'll get th' rope!" Dinny said, tears in his eyes.

Ryerson looked up. "What do I care?" he mumbled brokenly. "She was everything to me, an' I loved her!" He broke down completely, and cried over the silent, calm face.

"Ye could 'a had her, ef ye hadn't been so much of a man!" English Jack said.

"Aye, but I'll take my chances as I am." Ryerson stood up slowly; "We've got ye, English Jack, and ye'll pay your life fur this!"

"I'm willin'," the renegade answered quietly; "she ain't the Queen o' the Pack fur you!"

## THE STORY THAT DIDN'T COME TRUE

SPREAD out before her, clad in veils of purple wavering mists, the Manitoba wheat plains stretched away to great distances—one apparently endless solitude that was deep, and darkening fast in the twilight. The air was full of scent, those subtle fragrances which come after the ploughing burdened the atmosphere, mingled with the scent of early rosebuds that peered timidly from their green nests on the bushes about the house.

Clare Dale rested her cheek against a cool, white painted piazza post, her eyes wandering, travelled aimlessly over space of earth, and she sighed. Then, as a droning whisper at first that grew to sounds like those of bee's wings, a long line of glitters flashed across the horizon far away to the westward. It was the Trans-Continental Express, eastward bound. She watched it out of sight, listened to the droning whisper fading into silence.

"Fred, dear Fred," she whispered, sitting down on the steps, a tiny night air moving her hair slightly. Thoughts, memories, and waking dreams, passed slowly. She remembered it all—when he

first came from the East; when she first saw him, that night her father—old man Carew—had taken him on as helper in reaping time; how he had seemed to her then; how kind and tactful always, as her father's employee, he had been. And, incident by incident, she followed up the six years of days and weeks and months that lay between the beginning and now, taking the pleasure that only a woman can from little things that have gone into the vistas of a past. Men are men; they have everything in life, and they forget in the mad rush. But a woman remembers always. "And I'm so far beneath him," she whispered again.

Frederick Dale, from the East, as he had at first described himself to old man Carew, was one of those rare characters among men who live apparently to help others and yet do nothing material for fellow creatures. He could not when he came West, for he was bitterly poor. Kind words, little acts of thoughtfulness, nursing a reaper that had cut himself badly, doing double work for a driver to save the man's pay, these and many other things Frederick Dale did; and in their doing he avoided thanks, seeming to take his reward from the fact that he had done them. Small wonder that he was loved by every one. Small wonder that after four years Carew sold him at easy payment an excellent wheat farm and fitted him out with reapers, horses, and seed for the first sowing. At the end of that year he had asked Clare to marry him. She had known for a long time that he loved her, and she knew her own feelings only too well during those years of silence between them.

Sitting there in the soft chill of the gloom she could hear his words, as though they had been spoken but yesterday:—"Clare, dear, I have not been able to ask before, nor was it just that I should, but I think"—there he had put his hand quietly on hers—"that we have understood each other for a long time." That was all, but those words had meant so much to her, were so full of meaning to her now, that the very tones of his voice rang in her brain. That was a year ago. Then the boy came, and she saw again the delight in his eyes and the passionate tenderness with which he had first taken the bit of humanity in his arms.

But in her well of happiness there was one drop that tainted her waters of mental peace. She was just old man Carew's girl, while he—ah, he was clever, educated, everything. Once, and once only she had been at the station across the prairie with him on their ponies, when the express came in. She had seen him talking with men that got out of a beautiful car, the last one on the train. He had asked her to come; but she was frightened and slipped away in the crowd. He seemed hurt afterward, but never reproached her. She remembered telling him that she was afraid. Since then he had been even more kind and devoted. Often when he was on the fields she saddled Fawn in the evening—the grand little mare he had given her on her last birthday—and loped over the furrows to where two rigid lines of steel came as one out of the West and disappeared as one in the East. There she would wait until the express roared by, the ground shaking beneath her. She thought in

this way to get glimpses of "his people." Twenty years old, born and bred on the prairie, she was young and crude in everything but her love for him. She felt that she was crude, she knew that she was ignorant, and it saddened her to realise that she could not appreciate the things he did, the way he talked, the books he read. Only a girl of Nature's own, with nothing but her love and her life.

He had talked to her in the long winter evenings when the snow struck viciously against the windows and the wind tugged at the house, and told her of strange lands across the ocean where he had been. He read to her from books that he called Shakespeare and George Eliot and Dickens. She enjoyed them so; and he tried to explain the characters to her, but they belonged to a world that she could not understand.

Sometimes when he was away she peeped into these books and read along slowly; the effort lost the effect for her and she closed them sadly.

That she was beautiful she knew, because he had told her so, but she didn't care. To make herself what he was, to be like him, was the great cry of her soul. She got spelling books and a copy book and worked hard, so hard that her eyes ached and her temples throbbed. Then one night — she remembered the surprise—he was tired and could not write to Winnipeg. "Tell me," she had said, and he dictated to her. His words came strong. "Dear girl, all this work for me?" "Yes, and my life for you," she had answered. From then on she learned rapidly, and they read together every evening when the Chinese servant had gone to bed.

All these minute details of their life came to her to-night, each bringing its wee fragrant breath of pleasure that moved ever so gently through the long arches of memory and down the great aisles of the past.

Plat-a-plat. Plat-a-plat. She jumped up at the sound of a horse's feet.

"He's coming," she called, running into the house. "Lao! Lao!"

"T'lomen, Missy T'lare!" The little Chinaman popped from the kitchen.

"Mr Dale is coming—supper ready?"

"Allee l'eadee—fine!"

She ran out again. Yes—her lips trembled—yes he was coming. She heard him dismount, heard his words to the stable boy.

"Dearest girl!"

"My own!"

"Well, well, well"—he shook himself—"pretty late, honey, but I had to arrange about the steam reaper, and the wires are all busy to-day for some reason; so sorry. How's the lad?"

In answer she opened a door in the hallway quietly; they tiptoed in. A shaded night lamp gave out its warm glow from the corner of the room. In the faint light they leaned over a tiny crib, she on one side, he on the other. There was no sound save for the almost imperceptible breathing of the child. One little hand was on the coverlet; it grasped a white rattle. The man touched it gently. "My boy, my boy," he whispered.

"Mine!" she whispered back. He looked up at

her, with a world of sweetness and strength in his eyes.

"Ours!" They crept out.

"I'll run up and take off these dusty things," he laughed. "Go on with supper, I shan't be long!"

She carved the broiled chicken carefully, as she had learned to do by watching him, and picked out his choice bits—a wing and a "drum stick." Every least comfort that she could put in his path she sought; finding them here and there, she always placed them where he would see with the least trouble.

He bounded in then, full of life, teeming with health, a magnificent specimen of man. "Now then, Honey——" he kissed her—"what have you for a hungry being? Ah, chicken? You never forget what I like, do you? Dearest, I——" They moved apart guiltily when Lao burst in, for they were not long enough married to be hardened!

The "Chink" seemed not to notice, but he saw, and was delighted in his quaint Oriental way. The aloe eyes of jet black fairly glinted.

"Beggee muchee sorree int'lupt!" He deposited a plate of toast and some baked potatoes on the table. The man and the girl laughed.

"Go to bed Lao, quick!"

"L'ight away, Miss T'lare, l'ight away! Nightee, nightee!"

"Good-night," they answered.

"Sweetheart, have you been lonely?"

"Sur—— of course," she caught herself, "I'm always lonely without you." He waved a kiss to her and ate heartily.

"It's been a hard, long day," he said, as he sipped his coffee and lighted a pipe; "but," puff—puff—puff—puff, "I've sold the Wheeler land for \$6000."

"Six thousand dollars?" She was aghast at the greatness of their gain.

"Yes—here," he pulled a long case from his inner waistcoat pocket—"there it is!" He counted the money out on the white cloth in bills of \$50.

"But it only cost us \$1000."

"True, dear, but with the improvements and drains that I have put on, it is well worth the price. Now, you see, I can pay off the whole of your dad's last payment for our home; isn't that fine?" She moved round the table to him.

"You are so—" she hesitated for words.

"So what?"

"Oh, so everything!" He lifted her hands to his lips.

"And you are so true, so beautiful, dear." She bent her head shyly. "You always say them things, Fred, but me, I—" she kneeled by his chair—"somehow I am 'shamed before you."

"Clare, dear, you mustn't say those things, promise that you will not do so again?" The girl shook her head quickly.

"I think of 'em just the same."

"Why?" He took her face between his hands.

"Because you're educated—a gent—oh, Fred why don't you tell me, why haven't you ever told me about your—home—out East?" She slurred over the word "home" very gently. Dale turned away, his clean chiselled face sombre. He breathed

deeply, throwing his head back, compressing his lips in a rigid line. She saw the change.

"There, now I've asked too much." And tears gathered in the big gray eyes.

"No, you haven't, Clare, listen." While he lighted his pipe again she drew up a footstool and sat on it at his knees.

All was peace and quiet in the little room that was lighted by the soft beams of a low hung lamp. His thoughts seemed far away.

"Yes?" she whispered.

"Oh—ah—yes. Years ago—let's see—just twelve years ago, Clare, I lived in the happiest of homes, with everything mine that life, health, and youth give. It was one long joy of travel, of ease, of luxurious study. I used to write—once."

"Write what?" The girl's eyes were absorbed with interest.

"So-called novels, and stories, and——"

"Like Mr Dickens' books?"

"Hardly, dear!" He smiled sadly—"but it was my delight to create beings under my pen; to see them grow, their pleasures, and—finally—their great happiness. I wrote a story about a man who came out West, when I was fifteen years old,—just as I have done,—and who married a girl,—just as I have done." She nestled closer to him. "But that is as far as the truth of my tale goes, because the hero fought with robbers, was wounded, and his wife nursed him out of danger, and 'they lived happily ever after'! How vividly that story comes back to me! I remember my little den upstairs where I used to scribble away, dreaming that sometime I should be a

great author! How I worked over my adjectives, infinitives, and paragraph structure! And how"—his voice sank very low—"mother would listen to my reading, when I had finished, with all a mother's fierce enthusiasm and pride." He puffed hard. The girl felt that which he felt, but said nothing. When a tear threatened to glisten, she dabbed it away furtively.

"Dear mother—his voice shook—"it's all gone, isn't it? Your dream of my future, your ambition, your hope." Dale whispered on to himself, unconscious of the girl beside him. "It seems so far away, that time of my life; so very far away, mother; yet you and the Gov'nor were wrong, then!" He stiffened all over; the muscles of his jaws worked under the sun-burned skin. "I did not, mother, really, honestly. I wonder if you ever realise that? I hope always that you will see, even though our lives are separated, that I left it all because I could not stand the taint. Possibly I was a coward to have done so, but freedom, in a new world, even though it be a lonely one, is better than the other. I am lonely for you, lonely for your love, lonely for your advice, but I cannot go back now. One letter from you in months, dear; that's all I have to bind me to your physical presence. Yet you know where I am. You——"

The girl could not choke a sob. He awoke from his dream speech instantly. "Why, my little girl, my Clare!" He drew her toward him, smoothing the masses of hair that tumbled over her forehead. "Crying? What for, dear? I didn't mean to keep you waiting for my story so long. I didn't, honey.

Now, let's see. I stopped when I came to the end of my first story. That was when I——"

She stood up quickly. "You've told me everything, boy, and I've thought it more an' more times than I can count. Now I know."

"Know what?" He too rose.

"Know that you're longing fur your mother an' guv'nor; know that I ain't no fit wife for you; know that you might 'a' been a fine story writer an' had lots o' money an' things!"

"Who told you?" He took her hands firmly—aye, a bit roughly. She looked at him in awe.

"You just said it all—there," pointing to his chair.

"Clare, you are mad, girl—dreaming!"

"Am I?" she laughed bitterly; "then how comes it that you said," and she repeated almost word for word his whispered thoughts.

He gathered himself rapidly. "Sweetheart, it was I, then, who dreamt. You know how I love you, dear! There is no more truth in those dream words than in my first story of the robbers!" She made one step toward him.

"Hands up, quietly!" Dale looked toward the doorway. Two cold and steady 44's shone round and vicious. The girl closed her eyes.

"Sit down, honey," Dale ordered, as his hands went over his head. She obeyed.

"That's right, pardner. Now jest let me relieve yer of that wallet yer have in yer vest!" Dale backed slowly round the table toward a desk that loomed in the corner.

"Hate to give it up, don't ye, but I'm dead broke

and gotter git it. I've bin watchin' yer all d' afternoon!"

Dale caught the girl's eyes. She understood and, as the masked figure approached her husband, she leaned forward and slipped her hand under the tablecloth.

Crang! A window pane smithered as the bullet entered from the outside. She sank to the floor.

The masked man turned his head for just an instant, but it was enough. Dale got his long Colt from the desk. Then it was Bang! Bang! Crang! Bang! till the atmosphere was thick with powder fumes that hung, nauseatingly acrid. The lamp was shot out by the gun outside.

"God, I'm hit!" Dale muttered as his left arm refused duty. In the darkness he clenched the butt of the revolver between his teeth and reloaded with his right hand. He crawled over the floor, seeking to get the other between him and the faint light of the windows. Clare's body was in his path.

"Sweetheart? Sweetheart?" She was still.

"They've killed her!" he groaned.

"Got him, Dick?"

"Not yet, but, by God, I'll have him in or shake! You fellers keep watch on t' outside; I've winged the cuss an' he's a-crawlin' som'eres on t' floor! The damned woman's busted, too! What in hell d'ye down her fer?"

"She had a gun un'er t' table, un wuz goin' ter pop ye!"

"Alright, but it's er stinkin' job!" Thus the man inside answered the men outside.

Dale's agonised sorrow grew into a frenzied

craving for revenge. He crept away from the girl's body with that stealthiness only known to them that have blood lust. Then silence.

Each man sought the other; neither daring to fire lest by the spit of the powder their respective positions should be apparent.

"Hurry up, Dick; cain't you git t' dough?" The raucous voice from the night air came harshly.

"I cain't see the fool!"

"Kick round an' rouse him up!"

"Yep, an' git a slug in m' ribs! I'm full o' that game," the inside man answered sarcastically.

"Oh, by G——!" Dale listened to the curious thump and gurgle.

"Keepee stille!" Lao's whisper came thickly.

"Dick, Dick, t' Mounters be comin'; mind yerself!" Then the sound of horses' feet on the earth. Rat-a-plat, rat-a-plat, till it died away.

"There they go, men! After 'em hard!" Dale heard the jingling of spurs, the rattle of carbines and the hard breathing of horses as the Royal North-west Mounted Police swept by.

Silence again.

"Say, Misser Dlare, bossee p'leeceman gone catchee, catchee; gettee up!"

He got to his feet slowly. The Chinaman struck a match.

"Clare, my darling!" The girl opened her eyes, blinking as Lao set the chimneyless wicks of the lamp aflame.

"You're hurt, Roy?"

"And you, sweetheart?"

Tiny drops of red crept from her shoulder and

side; oozing through the muslin, they dragged their way to her finger tips.

"Only a touch, Fred." She sat up. He, overcome with the pain in his chest and arm, fainted.

She and the Chinaman looked at each other while the room slowly became dense with the sooty fumes of the lamp flaring in the breeze that came through the broken panes.

The girl thought hard, then—"Saddle Fawn, ride for the doctor; hurry, Lao!" Her voice was trembly, and she put her hand on the table to support herself.

"All rightee, Missy; Lao go quickeel!" She heard him tearing about the kitchen; he reappeared in a ragged coat, his pigtail tied around his neck, and an old pair of high boots.

"Me go; bye!"

The room moved about her; she got on her knees and crept to Fred's side. Having but one useful arm, she made long work of pulling his coat and shirt apart. Sometimes she could see his face, sometimes it was vague and blurred, so great was her pain and dizziness.

"I must help him!" She clenched her jaws and struggled on. Then she could not fight against the agony and lay down beside him, her face on his arm.

"Freddy, boy, Freddy," she whispered. "I can't help ye, I can't, an' I guess your love is finished fur me. Your story didn't come true, 'cause I can't nurse ye an' live happy ever after." A long pause, her breath coming in little, hard gasps. She felt for his face with her one good hand, and caressed it with

passionate tenderness. "Fred, I'm sufferin' bad, but I don't care, 'cept for our boy. I—" He moved restlessly, lifted his head.

"What happened Clare?" He looked around the room.

"I'm here," The tiny whisper came to his wandering senses as from a great distance.

"Don't worry about me, darling. I'm all right. Where were you when the fight was on?"

"He's forgotten everythin' 'cause o' his hurt," she muttered. "I ain't goin' to fret him." He groaned and his head fell back.

"A drop of whisky, please." The girl took a deep breath, tensioned her muscles to act, and stood up.

"I must—I must!" Always with the thought of him, she kept the side of her dress that was blood-stained away from his sight and poured the whisky with her left hand. She reached it to his lips and he drank it all.

"Thanks so much, dearest!" His eyes closed. "You see, honey, ha!" he chuckled brokenly, "my story has—come—true; robbers—you'll nurse me—we'll—live—isn't it funny? Kiss the boy for me to-night, and don't tell him Dad's hurt, will—you?"

"No." Her head was on his arm again.

"Sent for doctor?"

"Yes."

"The money's safe? It's for you and the lad."

"Ye-es."

She felt herself getting weaker; realised that her wits were flying. "Freddy—you'll always—love—the boy—our—boy?"

"Of course; we'll love him together."

A spasm of pain passed through her. "I can't tell him," she breathed, and continued with difficulty. "If you hadn't married me you wouldn't have got hurt out here, an' you'd be with your mother now!"

"Dear Mo-ther! But, Honey, she'll realise before it's too late how—much I love you, and everything—will—be right again."

She put her hand to her side and felt the hot spurts. "You're not sorry you married me Fred-dy?"

"Sorry? Sweetheart—I'm so glad, so thankful, because I've been a better—man since. You have taught me unselfishness—yes—everything that is good in the—the—world. I'm—weak—dear. A—bit—more—whisky—till—the doctor comes, please?"

She tried bravely to get up. No use.

"You'll—love—an'—watch—over the—boy?"

"What?" He couldn't hear her words.

Everything was dark and quiet to her. She felt herself as if drifting—drifting in a cool peace. No pain, nothing but her love for him, and that made her so happy. She tried to repeat, but her lips, somehow, would not obey.

"Say—you—lo-o-ve me." He got his face to hers with effort.

"Ah-h! Don't wo-r-ry, dear." She pushed her face weakly nearer to him and was still.

The night wind, growing stronger from the east blew the flames of the lamp powerfully till they licked a black stain on the brass supports. The bitter taste of powder was yet noticeable.

"I won't worry, darling; go to sleep—on—my—

arm. I've writ-ten mother,—she'll come—and—we'll go home together with—our—boy!" With half-shut eyes he looked at her beside him. "Poor—lit-tle girl, she's worn—out taking care of—me. Fun-ny my tale—came true though—fun-ny."

He breathed deeply then and slept from pure weariness and pain.

## SCOTTY

### I

SERGEANT DAN RIVERS, of the R.N.W.M. Police, stationed at a little "town" in Saskatchewan, tossed the book he had been reading on to the board table, and dropped his feet to the floor with a crash and a tinkle of spurs.

"Cur'ous how a man 'll write all kinds o' things that can't happen in life, ain't it?"

Al' Hayes, his "bunkie," laughed, as he flicked the ashes from his pipe.

"That's so, sure 'nough, but then a feller don't have to stop and think, s' long as the story's interestin'."

The room in the Police shack was hot and close. Over its plain rough walls a dozen or more bills of "wanted" men and their photographs were tacked in a line, the reward figures standing out sharply in heavy print. A few pictures cut from illustrated papers, the regulation side-arm "harness," a riding whip or two, and some spurs completed the decoration of the small interior.

Outside the air vibrated with heat waves,

and straight away beyond the main street the endless prairie rolled out under a scorching sun, bare and devoid of life. Sometimes a pony loped by, its rider white with dust, his face dripping with sweat.

The two men idly watched the clouds settle slowly back to the road. Not a sound anywhere, save for the monotonous *buzz* and tapping of flies and wasps against the upper window-panes.

"I know that!" Rivers said impatiently, "but listen to this." He picked up the book again, running over the leaves. "Ah, here 'tis!—'When she saw him go——'"

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of a tall figure tethering its jaded horse to the post before the door. The stranger patted the animal affectionately. "Hotter 'n a smelter, ain't it, ol' girl?" the two policemen heard him mutter. Then he turned.

"Howdy, boys?" His voice was deep and strong, and the eyes that were set far apart under heavy brows were alert and inscrutable. He stalked, rather than walked, through the white picketed gate, with a long peculiar swing, planting his feet at each step solidly.

Reaching the shadow of the shack, he took off his sombrero and mopped the dust-laden wet from his face and neck. "Rip-snortin'—certain!" The words were quick; short, as though bitten off. He shook hands with Rivers and Hayes; the latter looked at his fingers afterwards, to be sure that none were broken, so unconsciously powerful was the stranger's grip.

"How far d'y call it t' Battleford?"

"Hundred miles, straight as you can ride it."

"Any trail?" The big man dropped on a stool, the rowels of his Mexican spurs scratching against the rungs.

"Kind o' one as far as the first ford o' the river; after that it's keep the sun on your back by day and the North Star at your right shoulder by night. Why? You headed that way?"

"I'm thinkin' on 't," the other answered laconically. He clasped his chapped knees with both hands. "Yer see, boys, so to speak, I'm a stranger in a furrin' land, bound fur"—he hesitated just a second—"fur th' whul wide West, an' don't give a damn whar I fetch up s' long as there's good whisky an' a straight game o' poker going on! Say, that minds me, I ain't introdoodled meself yet! I'm Edward Cyrus—no, that ain't right—Cyrus Edward Bertram Winfield Thomas Scott,—leastways, that's the dog-gasted lot o' stuff they hung me up with at th' start. God knows how much I'll hev left o' 't at the finish. But say, boys, don't get skeart! It's only 'cause I'm puffectly sober—an' that's seldom—that I kin remember the whul o' it. When I'm drunk—and that's most o' the time—I'm plain Cy', or Ed', or Bert', or Win', or Tom, or Scotty. Take yer choice, boys; I'll answer to most anythin'!"

The two policemen laughed at the naïve way in which the big man introduced himself with those curious bitten words of his. Then—just what it was Rivers could not tell—possibly the angle of light—he seemed to recognise Scott's face.

"Hang it!" he whispered to himself—"where have I seen him?" And staring round as men do when perplexed, his eyes fell on the line of "Wanted's." There it was in plain print, and the photograph was a good one! Rivers looked towards his revolver that hung across the room from him.

"If I could only get that gun!" he thought. While visions of promotion grew in his mind, for the "Wanted" known as Winfield, *alias* Thomas, was the man who had "held up" the bank at Brandon single-handed and got away with \$11,000; who had calmly boarded the west-bound Trans-Continental Express at Regina, holding a sleeping-car ticket, and between that station and Pasqua had relieved the passengers of their valuables, dropping off somewhere in the darkness afterwards. Breaking into farmers' houses at paying time—when the wheat was in—was the smallest of this "Winfield's" crimes; therefore praise from Headquarters loomed brightly to Rivers, with the "Wanted" under his eyes.

"Will you stay the night with us—Cy'?" He forced his voice to steadiness.

Scott looked down the road and over the deserted prairie, where nothing but frills of shimmering, dancing heat met his gaze. "Don't mind 'f I do, pardner. Jess, she's nigh tuckered, poor ol' girl. Mind ye"—he swung around on the stool—"I'll pay fur me grub an' hers, but yer sassiety I cain't pay fur, nor yer kindness in axin' me to bunk yere. That'll hev to go on credit till I kin pay yer back—same coin—some time!"

Rivers edged his way carelessly towards his revolver; Hayes meanwhile chatting on about horses and cattle. The Sergeant was within three feet of his weapon. Scott looked up at him, a smile on his strong thin lips. "No need o' that!" he said grimly—"I ain't th' man, tho' I admits that the son-of-a-gun's got a physog' mos' like mine, but—— oh, a'right, pardner, they're up!" He held his hands over his head as Rivers covered him with the revolver. Hayes stared in astonishment.

"Get the cuffs!" Rivers ordered.

The constable rose.

"Say, you sergeant, I'm gettin' tired o' holdin' m' flippers up!"

"You'll be more tired before I'm through!"

The big man laughed heartily at Rivers' tense words. "Look-a-here, pardner, I ain't got no gun nor knife, only a measly toothpick—an' that's in m' saddle-bag—wish I had it now 'cause I got er bad tooth, an' grub sticks in it. Say, hey ye read th' argyments on that"—he ducked his head towards the poster—"ree-ward sign? Don't it read som'at like: 'Th' said Winfield *alyas* Thomas has a scar three inches long, of crescent shape, between his shoulders, and a mole beneath it. Hair black. Nose broken?'—Oh, I ain't agoin' ter slip, 'cause I wants ter bunk yere t'night."—Rivers, still covering the other, walked over to the line of posters. For an instant his eyes left Scott. In that instant the gigantic hands ripped open the shirt and red under-shirt from collar to waist. "Thar, pardner; kin ye find

any scar? Is m' hair black, 'r m' nose broke?" Rivers stared at the magnificent semi-nude figure, and approached it, revolver in hand. Scott twirled on his heel, "Hunt for it, pardner; git yer spy-glasses goin'!" The marble-like skin was even, save where huge muscles rose in rolls and fibres of strength. Not a scar, not a mole could Rivers see. The broad, naked back was white, save for long tiny threads of a wound that reached from shoulder to hips in square shape.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Cy'!" Rivers holstered his weapon sadly. "But you are the living image of Winfield."

Scott gathered his torn shirts together, and put them on. "Say, boys, I've been a'rested all th' way from Woods Mount'n here. Same name, same face,—but they always deescover that I ain't th' man!"

Hayes dashed in, a pair of handcuffs rattling metallicly.

"No need of 'em now, Al'." Rivers was disappointed and the visions of promotion faded.

"I don't bear no hard feelin's, pardner—not on yer life, 'cause I'm used to this game. Say, kin I hobble Jess som'eres round'bout?" Scott drew his belt tighter as he spoke.

The Sergeant nodded, and led the way to the little stable in the rear.

"Fine piece o' horseflesh this!" and the big man passed his great hands along "Duke"—Rivers' horse's withers. "Fine!" he said again—"go some, can't he?"

"Some!" Rivers answered with pride. "You bet!"

Scott unsaddled his little mare, put the leathers carefully in the corner on a pile of straw, then began rubbing her down with a bit of towel. "Ye see," he continued—zissing between his teeth as he wiped the drying yellow foam from between the mare's fore legs—"ye see, me an' Jess is jest like one, so to speak; where she goes I goes, an' vicy-versy—eh, ol' girl?" The mare whinnied softly, and played her lips over Scott's hand. "Thar, m' baby, that'll hold ye till morning!"

Rivers and Hayes noted the consummate art with which Scott cared for his horse; saw the gentle inflection of his fingers as he squeezed dust and wet from the slim hocks; marvelled at the way he sponged out the dry mouth.

"Now, pardner, hike the way to m' bunk, 'cause I want ter lose some hours o' daylight in gettin' square with lots o' night work! It's hard, this yere bus'ness o' chasin' Hell-bent-fur-leather—no-where!"

They went back to the shack.

"It's steep!" Hayes warned, as Scott put one foot on the lower rung of the ladder that led up to the sleeping-quarters.

"That don't bother me, pardner. I feels likes 's if I could shin up a greased pole—s' long as a real bed teetered on th' top!"

The three stood in the garret room. Scott looked round. "Say, you fellers live comf'rble, don't ye? This looks good to a man that ain't seen a' honest bed fur—well, fur weeks and weeks!"

"Pile in, Cy'—you're welcome!" Hayes pulled the

blue blankets back from his iron cot as he spoke. "You won't need *them* to-day!"

"Oh, I don't know!" Scott answered. "Here, hain't ye seen this trick afore?" With a deft sweep he lifted the mattress, jerked the blankets under it, kicked the edges tight. "Makes it softer, pardner! Beds is beds the world over. He pulled off his chaps as he talked, unstrapped the huge spurs, tossed them beside his knee-high boots. "Yes, pardner, beds is beds! We're born on 'em, half our life is spent on 'em, an' we die on 'em—if we're lucky! Some of us pass out with our boots on—jest a carcase. Them that's wise 'll die a'tween sheets; it's more comf'rble!"

Scott let his eyes range the walls of the hot garret. They stopped suddenly at a photograph of a girl that was tacked over Rivers' cot. "Who's that?" he asked softly, and strode over on his naked feet.

"That's Dan's girl, the one he's goin' to marry!" Hayes answered gleefully.

Scott looked at the face long. "Pretty girl!" And the words were more bitten than ever. "S' long, boys, fur a hour or so; beds is beds, y' know, an' this one hits me fine!"

He was asleep almost instantly. The two policemen watched the giant figure that lay innocently unconscious on the cot.

## II

"Oh, next week's too sudden, Dan!" The girl laughed and blushed.

The Sergeant, immaculate in his scarlet jacket, blue tight-fitting breeches with yellow stripes and "harness," stood up. "You've said that so long, Jess: *please*—next week?" And then he caught her in his arms and kissed her. "Say yes!" She shook her head. "Say yes *now*!"

"Ye-ye-yes—*there*! Now let me go, Dan; see, you've tore my dress with those spurs! My but you're as strong as my broth——" She stopped awkwardly.

"Your brother? Didn't know you had one!" He disengaged the little rowel wheel from the hem of her skirt. A curious look crept into her china-blue eyes.

"Did have one that worked out in the States in a steel mine or som'thing;—he—he's dead."

The policeman took her hands in his tanned paws. They shook a little. "There, there, honey, I've been a mite rough, but when a man loves like I do, he's kind o' apt to forget himself."

"It's — it's nothing, Dan; a girl gets nervous sometimes."

They sat down again, side by side on a sofa before the open fire, and their figures were brought out in strong relief by the dancing flames. Outside the wind shrilled and howled, while now and then a cloud of snow-dust spicked sharply against the windows.

"It's lucky my record at Headquarters was good enough to get me a transfer here!" The hand that lay in his tightened sympathetically.

"You've got a straight card, Dan?" She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes.

"Twelve years in th' service," he said musingly, staring at the brilliant embers of the fire—"twelve years, and not a mark agin' me—at Regina. But I've got a mark agin' myself!"

"How's that?" She nestled against him, her brown hair curling over the scarlet jacket.

"Ha!" he laughed grimly, "the time Cyrus—Edward — Bertram — Winfield — Thomas Scott—Winfield in short, came an' bunked—by God, *bunked*—overnight with me and Hayes in Saskatoon!"

Her face grew white. "Well, what's that got to do with your mark against yourself?"

"Do?" Rivers crossed his legs at full length, moving one foot up and down. "Do? Why *that* was the son-of-a-gun the whole force's been lookin' for!"

"Why didn't you capture him, then?" Something in her voice made him look round, but the pretty face was calm—inquiring.

"'Cause he had none o' the scars that the bill called for. But," and his voice became sternly cold, "I *know* he was the man, and even if Headquarters don't know it, *I* know, and it makes me—makes me mad to think o' the hound cheatin' me that way!"

"Cheatin' you?—how?" she asked softly.

"Out o' promotion and out o' my own self-respect, which is valuable to me—more so than money!"

"But if he didn't have the scars, he couldn't have been your man, could he?"

"It wasn't the scars, Jess; it wasn't anything real; but by the look in his eyes I felt that he was a 'bad' man. Take him then? No; o' course not! Why? No evidence! But he *was* the man just the same!"

The two were silent; he brooding over his defeat, she anxious and afraid.

Little by little the heap of embers faded from pale heat to dull red, and the shadows of the two were blurred into one on the wall beyond. His scarlet jacket loomed angrily in the faint light, and the butt of his revolver showed sullenly with its narrow band of nickel. Its "harness" creaked as he stood up suddenly, legs apart, hands clasped behind his back. The girl noted it all.

"If I could only get the drop on him,—jest once!" he muttered.

"S'posing he had—a—a sister an' mother that had nothing but what he gave 'em to live on?"

Rivers stiffened. "That's none o' my business!" he said abruptly. "Sentiment don't come into our work!"

"Couldn't you find no mercy in your heart, Dan, for a poor devil that's hunted from east to west and back again? That's supporting them he loves? Doing it wrong—yes, but th' end justifies th' means, don't it? This man's"—she paused—"mos' likely run t' death, and maybe he's got a sister an' mother, same's ma and me! Couldn't you"—she put her hand on his arm gently—"couldn't you find no mercy in your heart, Dan?"

He looked down at her face. "Duty's duty, Jess. I'm paid to do my work, and I'd do it even if it was *your* brother!" and he laughed.

She drew away from him—afraid of the glint in his grey eyes. "I'd never marry you if you did it!" she whispered; then she laughed hysterically. "We're talkin' nonsense, Dan! *You* is, especially."

Wait till you see what life has stored up against you—wait!"

He put his arm round her slim waist. "I've been waiting six months now, and I'm not goin' to——"

A violent slamming of the outer door interrupted him. He took his arm from her quickly as a muffled, snow-covered figure stalked in.

"Hello, Sis'! They're after me—I'm holed at last. Why, say, howdy, pardner? What you doin' over here?" The big man shook hands carelessly with the Sergeant, and threw off his fur capote. "This hits me fine!" Scott said, as he braced himself before the hot ashes. "He"—nodding towards Rivers, who sat motionless, "he's yer fyance, is he? Ye writ me 'bout him, last letter; said he was a fine feller—so he is; said he loved yer turrible—guess he do; said ye loved him, an' b' th' face o' ye I guess that's straight!"

"Ned! Why d' you come here?" She threw herself into his giant arms, sobbing bitterly. "It'll kill ma—she don't know, Neddy. Thinks you're workin' in a——"

"Smelter!" Rivers said grimly.

Scott pushed the girl from him. "This ain't no flim-flam game, Jess. I'm up agin' the real thing, an' I know it! Don't make me hold my hands up, pardner, 'cause I've done a long hard ride. Jess, she's dead out yonder—poor little mare, carryin' me from you red-coated hounds. She done her best, did Jess, and it don't seem like 's it's worth her life ter land me bang—facin' a six-shooter, do it?" Scott stared into Rivers' weapon steadily. "They're after me, pardner; they're on my trail hot, and they'll be

here damn soon!" He smiled grimly. "Yes, by God, I'm the man ye've been huntin' for, month in, month out. I, *me*, jest Tom Winfield, nipped away from th' bank t' Brandon, an' heaps o' other things I've done. But thar"—he chuckled—"ye know what I've done better 'n I kin tell it!"

Rivers stared, his gun steady on the big man. "How about that crescent scar, and the mole, back there when you bunked with me at Saskatoon?"

"Did ye ever hear o' *graft*?" and Scott laughed again.

The girl cried softly, her sobs filling the little room with muffled, gurgling sounds.

"Now, pardner"—Scott shifted his feet nearer to the ashes—"it's like this: MacPherson, from Calgary, 's after me, an' he's got six men with him, 'cause I counted 'em afore I started. They can't lose my trail in this moonlight. I'm wanted fur dynamitin' th' Post Office safe, an' it means——"

"Twenty years, with your record!"

"Right ye are, pardner, twenty years' hard labour for mine; unless ye kin see a trail out that'll clear everybody. They're comin', pardner," as the sound of sodden hoof-beats came.

"Say he isn't the man! Swear that Ned has been here for a week, or I won't be your wife!" Magnificent and strong she looked in the dim light.

"Hands up!" The Scotch sergeant thundered as he dashed in. Six constables followed, snow and water dripping from their coats.

"What for?" Scott answered.

"Yes, it's all up, *Winfield*!" Rivers said with emphasis.

The little Scotchman stared. "An' be ye sure? We've tracked him fer a theivin' anelee; 'tis nae but three years!"

"That man is *Winfield*!" Rivers said again, keeping his eyes from the girl.

"Sae—an'—so? Winfield? Pa'te th' cuffs on 'im, la-ads!"

Scott held out his hands willingly. The bands of metal clicked. "An' you, pardner, come close. Sis'!" The girl crept beside him. "I was watchin' ye, pardner, all th' time; an' ye didn't flinch when dooty come. Ye did yer work, girl or no girl! Self-respect first, love arterwards, an' to th' devil wi' th' rest. Say!" With a deft motion of his manacled hands he laid bare the haft of a knife, hidden in his sleeve. He tossed it to the floor. "Take it, pardner—keep it as a sooveneer o' me. Twenty years," he muttered; "hard labour! I deeserve it, though I kept her"—motioning towards the girl—"an' my mother alive by it. God knows who'll look arter 'em now; an' yet if ye hadn't done yer dooty I'd a cut the heart out o' ye, an' swung for 't; 'cause I lets no *coward* marry my sister!"

He turned to the girl sadly. "Sis', ye've got a honest man, an' yer lucky! Hang on t' him, that's th' best advice I kin give. S'long, pardner—I'm kind o' hampered wi' my hands now, but my heart is free yet, an' it reaches right out t' ye. Twenty years ain't long, an' when I comes out I'll show ye that I admires yer nerve. Sis', honey, take care o' that man, 'cause ye'll lope hundreds o' miles afore ye finds 'nother like him.

"Ready? sure I'm ready! Put me on a horse,

boys, 'cause I've got no hands. Thar! Nice pony this, but she ain't one—two—three with Jess! Only twenty years, Sis', an' I'll be five times a uncle then; 'bye!"

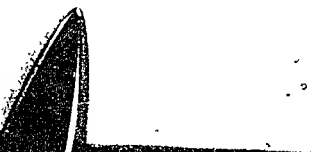
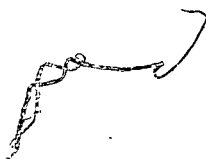
The troop of police cantered away in the vague daylight.

Rivers turned to the girl. "I only did my duty, Jess! I didn't know!"

"It wouldn't have made any diff'rence, would it?"

He shook his head gravely.

"That's why I love you, Dan!" she whispered; "even if you *did* give him away. Honest men 's scarce."



## BLUFF

ALEC WILSON knew he wanted to marry the girl, and was sure she loved him.

"How in thunder kin I make that old fool Martin agree?" This was his one thought, after the crops; and to-night, as he rode over the lone prairie trail, the thought came out into the air. The cayuse walked along rapidly, flecking its rope bridle to and fro, letting his feet swing from the heavy stirrups. It was one of those hot nights on the Manitoba wheat lands. Clear and far away the star-dotted heavens seemed, but the distances about him were blurred and vague. In the sloughs a few frogs tried to croak, but the slimy water was low, and their voices dry. Like rigid lines the nearly full-grown wheat bordered the trail; tall and heavy with grain, motionless. Gophers scuttled before him, with angry *ph-it's*.

"My God, it's so hot they won't whistle!" he muttered.

The little cayuse was sweating from every hair, while he, the big sombrero dangling from the saddle by its back strap, drew the water from his forehead and eyes with a quick clacking of his fingers.

"Holy drinks! This is a screamer; hottest I ever saw! Let go her; we'll get more money for the wheat!"

Horse and man moved slowly. "Steady, you!" as the beast stumbled in a gopher hole.

In the dancing distance ahead the lights of the "town" flickered dreamily. He reached them at last, tied the pony to the well-worn hitching-beam of Lascar's Hotel, and went into the bar, "just to get cool," he said to himself, ordering a flip-flap of raw whisky.

"How's things, Alec?" the bar-keeper asked.

He swallowed before he answered, "Pretty fine the way she looks now," and ordered "another" on the strength of the first. All the time he was puzzling how to make her father agree. I've got nine hundred acres in wheat; it'll go thirty bushels to th' acre, *sure!* I've got a good house, two cows, three horses and a mule! What ails the old devil?

He got excited as he thought, and beckoned for "another of the same."

There were not many in the bar. Some straggling farmers who had nothing to do, and all their time to do it in; one or two half-breeds who skulked in the corner; a commercial traveller, much the worse for wear, who valiantly sang "Annie Laurie" to the tune of "Yankee Doodle"; a nigger from somewhere under the sun, and a Chinaman smoking placidly. This was the "crowd."

The place stank of bad whisky and worse beer, and glittered with tawdry cheap mirrors that gave a museum effect when they were looked at; guttering

candles that dropped grease over the floor and everybody, dilapidated tables, half a dozen chairs that tottered on three legs apiece (some had only an apology for the third leg), and a pile of sawdust near the door.

Alec thought hard; to ease this operation he ordered "same" for all hands. The half-breeds stopped their squabbling, the "Chink" woke up from his pipe dream, the farmers (who were almost going home) decided to stay awhile; the traveller changed his mixed tune to a straight effort at "God save the King" ("we're—hic—in—Can'—dy," he explained in justification). By this time Alec felt that he was being insulted by old Martin.

"Wh'at the devil," he started, "hain't I got three thousand acres in wheat, forty cows and horses and mules, seven houses and a couple o' barns, to say nothin' 'bout pigsties?"

"Shure, lad, 'sure," Tim O'Flynn, the inscrutable bar-keeper, answered softly. "Shure! Have another drink, an' ye'll be a sight richer!"

"You vellee fine feller," the Chinaman said; "gottee longee think!" He hesitated, then, "Nicee way fo' gettee rich quick—see?"

Alec looked at him, and he subsided. "Wh'at you talkin' 'bout, you yaller peril, you!"

He turned gravely. "Gents, I'm up against it! Ol' Martin says I'm ain't got money enough ter marry his darter; wh'at w'uld ye do in a case like this?"

"Buy him out or freeze him out," somebody answered.

Alec pondered solemnly. "They say," he waited,

looking around, "they say as how the devil looks after his own: am I right?"

"Bet your life!"

"That bein' the case, I'll play the old soaker fur any amount, at poker, of course. I'll run him a race from here to there," he waved his arm out of the open door, "an' back; I'll——"

"Hurray!" they yelled, banging their glasses.

"I'll fight him with toothpicks," Alec continued.

"Aye," he grew bolder with the applause, "I'll——"

"What?"

No one had noticed the tall old figure, with its long grey beard and keen eyes, standing in the doorway.

"Hello, Martin: have a drink!" Alec sobered considerably.

"No," the old man answered curtly, "not with the likes of you!"

Alec was angry at the rebuff. "Here, you old wisehead: you told me this arternoon that I hadn't money 'nuff to marry your darter, didn't ye?"

"I did!"

"Wall, I got hard cash enough to play poker with ye fur a few minutes, anyhow: will ye play?"

"I don't take money from drunken men."

"Oh, so ye'r askeart to play, eh?"

"Cowairde," one of the half-breeds whispered; the others heard, and took up the cry.

"Coward! Jew! Fool!"

"Not vellee nice," the Chinaman volunteered.

Old Martin turned as though struck with a whip. "Ye'r all fools," he said quietly, "but if you want me ter play, I'll play; only 'member that Alec's

drunk! But, drunk or sober, I'll take his money fur this!" He sat down at one of the tables.

Unsteady as he was, Alec's eyes had a calculating gleam. He wandered gravely to the opposite side from old Martin, and, judging his distance, flopped on the chair. He struck one of the "apologies," and lurched over. The "Chink" heard the rattle of coin, and sneaked around looking for any stray "bits."

"Not'tee do'ee," he muttered peacefully, while the crowd bolstered up the chair with some slats from a case of beer.

"M'ch 'bliged, boys! Here, you glass-factory, hand out the 'same'!"

The bar-keeper busied himself in the worthy cause (.50 a drink). Alec turned up his sleeves, tore his flannel-shirt collar apart, and fixed his feet hard in the cracks of the floor—in case the slats should give way.

"Cards!" he shouted; "bring on yer weepsons!"

O'Flynn tossed them over the bar: a greasy pack they were, sticky and worn, chafed and bedraggled.

The crowd gathered round. The traveller felt there was "something doing," but couldn't make out what it was. "Ge's drink! I must be gettin' sober!" he called, with much pathos.

"I'm watchin' th' game!" Tim snarled. There was nothing for it, so the traveller worked his way to the others. Old man Martin sat his seat calmly and dispassionately; his roll of bills and heap of change were neatly arranged by his right hand; on his left were a couple of long cigars. His face was a

mask, and with sombrero tilted on the back of his head he was the quintessence of science at the game.

Alec was flushed with the heat—and other things; his shirt wide open, hair on end, money shuffled anywhere over the table within a radius of a foot, but eyes still keeping that curious stare, as if he were “seein’ things” already.

“High deals!” Martin’s voice was even and low.

They cut. Martin’s King, Alec Queen.

“Good sign,” the latter whispered.

Flap-pety—flip—flap—shst—flip—flap—fr-rp—flup—flip. The cards were dealt.

“Three!” Alec got them.

“Dealer takes one.” Martin took it.

“Fifty dollars!” Alec was getting steadier.

“See you, an’ raise fifty!”

“It’s yours.”

“Allee samee vellee fine,” the Chinaman chuckled.

“I told you to shut up once,” Alec growled. The yellow man was silent, smoking on happily.

There was silence in the bar; only the deep breathing of men, and sometimes the slip of a foot over the floor.

The cards didn’t come well then, and for an hour the game dragged, Martin in the lead.

Alec was nearly sober, the old man excited by the two hundred odd dollars he had won. The crowd stayed, watching eagerly; even the traveller could distinguish between ten of spades and the deuce of hearts (O’Flynn would *not* serve drinks). Then, hand by hand, Alec’s money pile dwindled. If he held a “straight,” old Martin had a “full house”;

when he tried to improve his cash by forcing "three of a kind," the other had "three" that were better; and so it went on down, even to when Alec put twenty-five dollars on King high, the old fellow had Ace up.

Martin grew more and more excited. (O'Flynn thought he was going to order a drink, but he didn't.) His eyes sparkled as his pile grew higher and overflowed the table. He struck some coins with his arm; several fell to the floor, and a cigar. The "Chink" was watching, and gathered in the loot.

"You dlopee cleega'!" he said apologetically, placing it on the table—nothing else! Nobody noticed.

Then Martin had all Alec's cash. The two stopped for an instant, the crowd hanging on their words.

Alec gathered himself.

"I'll play my standin' wheat agin' the pile you got there?" He drew a deep breath.

The other made a quick mental calculation.

"All right."

Alec's deal. He squeezed his cards hard, then looked. "How many?"

"Two!" The old man could not keep back the triumphant ring in his voice.

"Dealer takes one."

"Show down, show down," the crowd muttered.

Martin turned up his cards one by one with pride—all Clubs.

Alec smiled grimly, and threw his on the table at once—four Queens.

There wasn't a sound for a full minute, then:

"Dam' fine allee samee!" The "Chink" couldn't resist the temptation to speak.

Alec threw one of the candles at him; he dodged and smoked as ever, placidly.

"Now then, you old bearded lady, we'll see ef ther's any sportin' blood in ye, since ye ain't afeard to take money from a drunk!"

Alec was on his feet, steady as a steeple, but mad right through.

"Well?" Martin looked up at him dazedly.

"I'll now play you this pile I've won agin' your wheat crop an' mortgages; bettin' on the side to be notes for buildin's and sich! Are ye game?"

The old fellow jumped to his feet, eyes aflame. "Aye, an' right sure I'll play ye; I ain't afeard!"

Martin's deal. The crowd held one another's hands in tense excitement. The commercial traveller whispered, "My Heaven, my Heaven," over and over; he was sober.

Alec's face was expressionless as he looked at his cards. "One," he said briefly.

The Chinaman shivered.

"Dealer three." Martin's voice was shaky till he picked them up.

"Bet!" he said incisively.

"Keep score, Tim, will you?"

"Shure!" The Irishman got a bit of paper and a stub pencil.

"One horse," Alec announced slowly.

"See you one horse, an' raise yer a cow."

"See yer cow, an' lift her a couple o' pigs!"

"Look at yer pigs, an' h'ist 'em twenty chickens an' a coop!"

"See all that truck, an' raise you a mule!"

"Watch yer mule, an' lift a haystack o' good hay and a plough!" Martin was growing very excited.

"See those little odds an' ends, an' hoist 'em my big barn!"

"See your barn, an' come again with my granary!"

"Oh!" Alec shouted: "this is too infernal slow! See your rot, an' hoist it all my buildin's agin your house, granary an' contents!"

The old man looked at him sharply, then studied his own cards, looked at him again, studied some more, but learned nothing.

Alec's face was as a graven image, his eyes focussed on his hands.

No one moved, they scarcely breathed.

"God!" old Martin whispered: "I dassent, I dassent risk it; but—no, I can't! The wheat and mortgages is yourn!"

He threw his cards on the floor bitterly.

A thin smile played over Alec's lips. "Ye'd better not!" he said, with a harsh sound in his throat.

The other stood still, his eyes wandering aimlessly, till at last a tear trickled slowly down. "All gone, Susan," he groaned, turning away—"all gone: my little gal, my little gal!" He broke down completely, and sobbed. The crowd were at once uncomfortable.

"Say somethin', Tim," somebody suggested.

O'Flynn didn't like the job, but advanced bravely.

"Brace oop, man, brace oop! Have a drink," was all he could think of.

The cards of the last hand still lay on the table. The nigger had picked up the old man's.

Somehow Alec felt sorry—but he wanted Susan, the girl!

"Look—a—here, Martin," he put his hand on the other's shoulder. "I got lands an' money now, ain't I?"

The old man looked up quickly.

"Will ye say the word that I kin marry Susan? Ye know she loves me, an' I loves her, an' ye can't take keer of her now, because I'm goin' to close on these mortgages termorrer."

The strong old will was beaten. "Aye," Martin answered brokenly, "ye've beat me, and I'm a poor man. I know she loves ye, an' ye's all right when ye don't drink; I was sot that ye shouldn't have her till ye had money; ye've got mine now! I would not have give ye one cent, but ye won it fair, and ye kin have her. I'll go!"

Alec's face changed. A glow of something new illumined it; his eyes shone strangely. "That's yer word, Martin?"

"Aye; it's good enough, ain't it?"

"Here's my answer," the young man laughed, tearing up Tim's score bit by bit. "The girl's mine! I don't want yer wheat an' mortgages; an' look here, Martin!" he slowly tipped his cards face up on the table. Only ten spot high—a worthless hand!"

The old man stared as if in a dream, while Tim looked at *his* cards. Three Jacks!

"It was only a bluff, Martin; my last chance, an' I took it, an' won what I wanted! Here,"—he hurriedly counted out a pile of bills from the money—

"here's about what you started with: take it back. I don't want it; I only wanted *her*."

The crowd gaped and were silent.

Old Martin stood up slowly. "Ye'r a good lad, and honest. Ye've beat me by a bluff, but I stands by what I said." He held out a hand. "Shake, son: I'm willin' ye should have her now; only giv' up drinkin' fur her sake, boy."

Alec took up the glass of whisky Tim had filled for him, and dashed it into the hot dawn outside.

"Thar it goes—my last. *This* ain't no bluff, Martin!"

In a few minutes the bar was empty, while daylight crept brighter and brighter out of the east.



## THE TRIAL

### I

AS far as the eye could reach, wheat-fields rolled on and on, bowing and swaying rhythmically in the fresh westerly breeze. The wheat was but a few inches high, and it rippled like the rippings of the sea, pale green in the sun, dark olive in the shadows. Masses of voluminous white wind-cloud played across the face of the sun, their shadows chasing one another by squadrons, dodging in and out among the rises of land.

Corporal Walden sat his horse by a gully side, sombrero hanging from the saddle by its strap, the carbine and revolver butts showing black and clean from their holsters.

The strength and joy of youth was stamped on his strong face. His blue eyes swept the horizon with a swift yet thorough glance, and the curly brown hair moved as the wind careered riotously along.

"The old R.N.W.M.P. isn't half bad a day like this!" he said aloud, breathing the fresh-scented air deeply. The horse moved one ear inquiringly, and looked round.

"Yes, Ruby, I'm feeling very fit, thanks, old girl!"

He patted the sleek neck that arched coquettishly under his caress.

"On we go!"

The powerful mare broke into a long swinging lope. Man and horse seemed one, the earth giving back soft thuds as her feet skimmed lightly over it. Mile after mile appeared before them, passed beneath, and fell away into the green behind.

"I think my duty *requires* an early morning visit to Chinook Farm!—eh, Ruby?" he laughed boyishly.

"You know what that means!—sugar—maybe an apple? She doesn't forget you!—*Alice*."

A world of love was in his voice as he pronounced the name.

Feeding birds fluttered from his path, circling low over the prairie with musical trills; a coyote eyed his approach from a hill top. Impudently it allowed the horseman to come close, then with a whisk of its tail it darted away—a streak of grey-brown melting into the green.

At last the farm buildings hove in sight. Prosperous and cheery they looked in the brilliant warm sunlight. Grey-blue smoke twirled from several chimneys, and the lowing of cattle was softly borne to him down wind. He searched for a well-known figure in some light dress.

"She doesn't know that I've made this one of my 'visiting' days!"

In answer to his laughing hail, a tall figure appeared at the stable door. It started, seeing him, turned back for an instant, then came forward.

Andrew Stephens was reckoned the handsomest

man "East o' Calgary"—and the strongest. He was old Jeb Stephens's eldest son—and Alice's brother.

"Top of the morning, Andy!"

The Corporal swung himself from the saddle.

"How'd'ye, Howard."

Walden looked up quickly.

"What's the matter? You look scraggy."

The big man laughed nervously, but the Constable did not notice it.

"Nothin' much—got a nasty bad tooth—awake all——" He bit his lip.—"Didn't know you'd be round t'day. Will ye put Ruby in th' barn?"

Walden blushed as—saddle flap over his head—he loosened the mare's girths.

"Well,—(tug)—I thought that as I was going past anyway I would—(tug) drop in and see (tug)——"

"Th' gal, eh? It's all right, lad, I used t' feel that a—way once too. Th' old man's cranky this morn'n—keep shy," he said over his shoulder.

There was a curious ring in his friend's voice that Walden could not understand, but at that moment *she* came round the corner of the main house, and he forgot all about it for the time.

Sombrero hanging from his arm, he led Ruby towards her. She held one hand behind her back. The mare muzzled eagerly and found the sugar.

"I saw you coming," she said gravely.

Words rushed to his lips, but were cut short at sight of old Jeb, tall, slightly stooped, grizzled locks falling almost to his shoulders, who slouched towards them, saying—

"What ye doin' round agin? Only Friday ye stabled here!—What?"

"Get ye in th' house, gal, an' to yer work!" He stared at the Constable beneath shaggy brows.

"Is this whut the Gov'ment pays ye fur? A-hangin' 'bout a man's farm! Ye're only called on to come onct a week; if 'summat goes wrong betwixt times, I'll send ye word."

Walden stiffened; an angry retort rose, but he slowly recinched Ruby in silence.

The old man watched him.

"Which way ye goin'?"

"On my patrol," the young man answered abruptly.

As he trotted from the gate he caught sight of her waving from an upper window. He kissed his gauntleted hand and did not look back again.

"That's blamed funny!" he muttered as he loped on, loose reined. "Never seen Andy that way, nor the old man as touchy!"

One by one little incidents came to his speculating mind. Andrew's start at his appearance, his nervous laugh, the warning about his father, the old man's sudden appearance and sneaking slouch, his roughness to the girl, though hitherto he had never objected to the Constable's evident suit.

Walden rode silently on, thinking hard.

Rounding a low bottom along which the faint trail zigzagged, the mare planted her fore feet, slithered along in the damp earth and refused to move.

Instantly the Corporal was alert. He and the mare understood one another. Slipping from the saddle he tossed the reins over her head so that they dragged.

Nothing unusual was to be seen. He advanced warily, looking back he saw that Ruby's nostrils were dilated and that they trembled.

"Strange. She smells something!"

A clump of prairie bush was in his way, he stepped aside.

"*Thunder!*"

Arms outstretched, eyes already set, a hunted look of fear still on his features, lay a man. The small hole in his right temple told the story. Walden saw where he had plunged headlong from his horse, found where the frightened animal had swung sharp round and galloped furiously to the south. Not a sign of it was to be seen on the horizon, though the Corporal searched it carefully with his glasses.

"Al' Benson, by all that's true!"

He touched the body. It was stiff.

"H'm! *Rigor mortis* already; been dead more than six hours;—that's certain.

He looked at his watch—"9.30! Then he was shot about 3.30 this morning."

Walden's own thoughts vanished, their place was taken by the keen, analytical reasoning representative of the King's Law.

"What could have been the motive?"

The dead man's watch, a considerable sum of money were apparently intact.

"Could it have been suicide?" He turned the body over.

"No!" as he discovered a long weal at the back and top of the head; the hair was ruffled *forward*, showing that the bullet had "breathed" along the scalp from behind.

"Missed him first time, then when he turned to look, pinked him, that's plain!"

Rapidly he sketched the position of the body in his note book, jotting down all the facts and signs.

"Guess I'll go back to Chinook and see if they've heard—*By Heavens!*" he whispered.

Silence save for the *tinkle-ching* of bit as Ruby pawed restlessly.

"Al' Benson and Jeb never got on. Al' wanted to marry Alice two years ago. She never liked him, and the old man kicked him out of the house, swore he'd kill him yet. Then Al' set his out-prairie on fire;—at least I'm sure he did, though it was never proven. Jeb thought so too. Then Andy knocked him down in Lazy Ben's Saloon last winter for talking too much. He hasn't been as near as this to Chinook since then to my certain knowledge."

Talking aloud, his eyes wandered to the dead man's hands. One of them seemed to clutch something. He unbent the fingers with difficulty. It was bit of light material with a flower pattern.

Sweat shone on the Constable's forehead.

"*Her* dress?—What's the meaning of this? Oh, my God, what does *she* know?"

He was trembling.

"*That* forces me to go to Chinook."

He put his hands over his eyes; a sob caused the mare to cock her ears.

Dry-eyed, his cheery face haggard and drawn, he mounted heavily and went slowly by the way he had come.

The buildings seemed deserted as he approached, but he heard the rattle of dishes and voices within.

At the door of the broad kitchen he stopped. Old Jeb half rose, but Andrew made him sit still.

"Have dinner, Howard?"

The girl was watching his white face.

"I'd like a word with you, Andy?"

The hard ring in his voice surprised them all, owners and workers alike.

"Al' Benson's been murdered, Andy!"

The other's face became set and expressionless.

"That so? Where 'bouts?"

The Constable watched him closely, and noted the slight twitching of his lips under the heavy moustache.

"I've — found — him — not — far — from — here." Speaking slowly, Walden put his hand on the other's shoulder.

"Now look here, old man, if you know anything about this, it would be far better for us all to give it to me straight *now*, so that—I——"

"You're a fool!" The big farmer shook the hand off roughly. "What in hell should I know 'bout it?"

"When did you see Al'—last?"

The other broke a twig he held with a vicious snap.

"Not since 'long back last winter!"

"Where were you this morning,—say about 1 o'clock?"

"Where should I be but in m' bed?—Turned in at 9,—slept till break o' day."

"Why did you tell me two hours ago that you had been up with a bad tooth, then?"

"I—I—, damn ye, why sh'd I answer yer fool questions?" He started for the house.

"On yourself be it, Andy. Friendship can't stand in the way of what I've sworn to do—and that's to protect *you* and others like you on the prairie. I'm not saying that there's anything wrong here,—all I want is what information you can give me. Don't you see that your actions put a queer look on matters?"

The other did not answer. His foot was on the sill. Walden felt that he wished to warn the old man and,—he dreaded—the girl.

"Stand where you are!"

His revolver covered the other, who held up his hands.

"So it's come to *this*, has it?"

"God knows, Andy, it's costing me more than—than—" he coughed, "you know."

"Th' gal'll think a *lot* o' ye after treatin' us, who've allus had an open door an' a meal for ye—like murderers!" He laughed sneeringly.

"Will you give me your parole to stay outside?"

"Not on yer life!"

"Then about face! March!"

Heads withdrew hastily from the kitchen door as they approached. A dead silence as Walden pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," briefly.

He half-holstered his weapon.

"Sorry, Mr Stephens, that——"

"Oh, curse ye, *curse* ye!" the old man screamed.

"That will do, sir!—Now then—" he hesitated—  
"Miss Stephens, what was Al' Benson doing here last night?"

Jeb's face went white to the lips. The muscles of Andrew's jaws worked spasmodically. Walden looked yearningly at the girl. Her brown eyes seemed petrified with terror. The Constable's own feelings were bursting for utterance, but he held himself with an iron hand.

"He—he—hasn't—he was—wasn't here."

He saw that it was with the greatest effort she met his eyes.

"Will—you—swear—to—that?"

The tension in the room was terrible, *Rasp—rasp—rasp*. The rat's gnawing was loud in the stillness.

"Keep your face to yon *wall*, Stephens!" Walden thundered.

One of the younger farm lads began to whimper.

"*Silence!*—Well—Miss Stephens, are you prepared to——"

"Have pity, Howard, I——" She slid limply to the floor in a faint.

Not a movement.

"One of you get some cold water, take her to her room."

When the shuffling ceased, he questioned the workers, but it was very evident that they knew nothing.

Father and son would not speak.

"There's only one thing for me to do," he said then, "and that's to take you both and—and your daughter to Woods Mountain Post and send you to Headquarters for examination. Al' Benson *was* here last night. I *know* it!"

"Oh, ye're so smart! Wait till we get ye afore the Commis'ner! How d'ye know—since ye say so—that he wuz here?"

"By this!" the draggled, creased bit of the girl's dress fluttered in his fingers.

"By God!" Jeb mumbled faintly.

"Al' had it in his *right* hand, showing that he had no chance to draw his gun, or he would have dropped this. That's a piece of the dress I've seen Ali—— your daughter wear often."

Andrew's eyes seemed black.

"We'll ha' to go, Pops, I suppose—but it's hard, bitter, bitter hard."

"Aye go—go—go—an' never come back."

The old man's spirit was broken; he got up—aged by ten years.

"Go—go—go—an' never come—come back," he repeated huskily.

Walden let them gather a few belongings, some clothes.

"Get th' gal ready, Howard, we won't run."

The change in his friend's voice, its depths of sadness wrung the Constable's heart.

"*Can't* you explain, Andy?"

The other shook his head.

Walden trusted them to give various orders. He went up the narrow stairway timidly. A closed door on his right came first. He knocked.

"Who's there?"

The voice was full of tears.

"It's I,—Alice."

The door opened. She flung herself into his arms.

"As you want me to marry you, Howard, for God's sake don't——"

It was more than he could endure.

"I am sorry," he said gruffly, "but you will have to go with me."

"Go? *Where?*" She shrank from him.

"Woods Mountain first, then to Headquarters."

"*Woods Mountain? Head—Headquarters?*" she breathed. The little clock ticked the minutes away relentlessly.

"Must I, Howard? *Must I?*"

"Yes, dear, you must."

"But what—what have I done? I—I—told you that he hadn't been—been here! You've no right to call me 'dear.' You don't believe—*O-o-ah!*" as, fascinated, she stared at the bit of gay material.

"How did Al' come to have it in his hand?"

Her head drooped and she burst into tears.

Walden's attention was caught by a glimpse of colour from behind a curtain. He pulled it and the dress that matched the piece he had felt at his feet.

She sobbed on. Hurriedly he examined it, awkward in his ignorance of how to turn it. But he saw that there were many rents and splits. He tucked it in a bundle under his arm.

She stood waiting, such a pathetic figure in her little brown cape and felt riding hat, stifling her sobs.

"I'm—I'm ready."

Blinking hard, he took her in his arms and kissed her forehead.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me, Alice—if you can. I'm only trying to do my duty."

She was passive and silent, following him down.

The horses were saddled, but Andy was not visible.

The Constable heard a sound in the space that is used for log wood; he pushed the door open softly. The young man sprang to his feet from behind a stack.

"What's that you're hiding?"

"Nothing."

"Move away and let me see." He stepped past the other. "Ha! You would?" He ducked just in time to avoid the bright bit of the axe that struck with a splintering crash on the lintel. The revolver seemed to grow in his hand, but Andrew's hands were over his head.

"That's the last," he said brokenly, stumbling out.

Walden felt round in the gloom; his fingers closed on cold steel and he pulled out a ten-shot carbine.

"Lately fired!" (smelling the muzzle). "Two cartridges gone!"—counting eight lead-pointed brass bits as they dropped from the action. "A. Stephens," deciphering the initials in the stock.

The girl was waiting for him; she did not seem to notice the carbine, as she said—

"You don't know what you are doing, Howard. Listen; won't you believe me if I *swear* to you that none of us killed Al?"

"Don't make it any harder for me, Alice. Tell me what you know, then?"

But she was silent.

They mounted. Andrew and the old man rode ahead, he following with the girl.

The sun was slowly sinking into a misty west as the last rise from which the buildings could be seen was topped.

"Go—an' never come back!" Jeb repeated. The girl cried softly.

"It isn't far now. Are you tired?" Walden put his hand on hers. She moved her pony away.

The soft star sheen, the fragrance of the night had no beauty for Walden. The joy of life had been blotted out suddenly and swiftly for him.

Soon the lights of the Police Post twinkled ahead.

"Jack, oh—Jack?"

"Hello!"

The wide door was flung open and a flood of warm light spread itself in the darkness as four Constables pushed forward.

"Why here's Jeb and—" peering at the other two —"blest if Andy and —and Miss Stephens ain't along too! We'll have a jolly——"

The Corporal's expression silenced his gay chatter.

"Put Andrew and Mr Stephens in the main cell. Miss Stephens can have our room, we'll bunk in the front. Abernathy take first sentry go. Williams and Sykes roll up a stretcher, ride to the last bottom but one the other side of Coyote Run. You'll find Al' Benson's body by a clump of bush, the only clump there—you can't miss it and the moon'll be up in an hour. Sling him between you and bring him in. Keep an eye out for his horse."

Walden said it all dully as he unbridled the mare.

The men saluted stiffly, and riding off, left him alone in the gloom.

It was done as he had ordered. The prisoners had been fed, and the girl given the use of the four-

bunk room and whatever poor comforts his solicitude could suggest.

Outside Walden could hear the regular *tramp—tramp* of the sentry, and sometimes the metallic ring of the carbine as he shifted it from shoulder to shoulder.

The hours passed slowly.

"Gloom, sorrow *everywhere*," he sighed. "My God, why should *I* have been chosen for this? What have I done?"

The girl tossed restlessly.

He had turned the lamps low so that its flare should not shine over the partition in her eyes. In the half-light he sat on waiting—hopeless and unutterably sad.

"Andy *must* have done it," he repeated over and over again, going through each smallest detail from the very beginning with minute care—"but *why*? And *what* was Al' doing with her dress in his hands? And *what* made her lie? It'll all come out at the trial," he shuddered at the word.

A rap on the window from the sentry.

"*Quiet!* man,—what is it?"

"Somebody coming from the east."

"Williams and Sykes most likely."

Still Walden took his revolver and stepped into the night.

Nearer and nearer came the pounding hoof-beats.

"Right, sir, we found him." They lifted the inert mass to the ground.

"Put it in the back shed," was all that the Corporal said.

Soon the sentry was relieved and the other three snored loudly at Walden's feet.

He put out the lamp and tried to sleep, but that was impossible. He longed to see her, to say, to beg—ah, what did he *not* want to say to her.—But that, too, was impossible.

## II

The chill Court-room at Headquarters was as grey as the weeping skies. A desolate wind rattled the loose window sashes, and the *his-s-s-s-s* of driven rain swept the shingles overhead mournfully.

The faces of the officers in charge of the trial of Jebson Stephens, Andrew his son, and Alice his daughter, as being implicated in the wilful and pre-meditated murder of one Albert Benson, were sombre.

A murmur rose from the body of listeners in the Court-room as Lazy Ben, saloon-keeper, stepped from the box—the last witness.

"Your Honour the Commissioner, I should like to call Corporal Walden once more?" the prosecuting officer asked. It was granted.

Years seemed to have passed over Walden in a few weeks. His face was seamed, great hollows were sunk under his eyes, and when he stood in the box he swayed slightly.

"Corporal Walden, the case is practically closed, and you may be gratified to know that this murder—this *execrable* and *cowardly* murder has been brought to light, its perpetrator and accomplices—shall we say—*convicted*?—of a dastardly crime, solely through your clear and concise evidence."

Walden winced from the even words as from blows. He bent his head, and felt her lonely frightened eyes on him from over there in the prisoners' dock. Tears started and would not be held back.

"I quite understand your feelings, Corporal.—Ah—er, you were at one time engaged to the female prisoner, were you not?"

The Commissioner leaned forward and whispered something.

"*Of course not*, your Honour, I was merely endeavouring to bring to the Hon. Court's notice the fact that Corporal Walden has permitted nothing to interfere with the discharge of his duty. That will do."

The rain droned on and on.

For some moments the three members presiding whispered together, then the Commissioner rose.

"Prisoners, stand up. Have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed on you?"

The old man and his son stared straight before them, the girl sobbed with hard, choking sounds. Walden sat with bowed head.

Neither of the prisoners answered.

"Then it is my painful duty to——"

At this moment the great door swung open with a crash. The Commissioner looked up as, in a long coat and riding boots, hatless, plastered with mud, a man rushed to the bar.

"*Dick! Go back!*" the girl screamed and dropped.

"Order! Order!" bellowed the Sergeant.

Self-possessed, breathing rapidly, the stranger bowed to the Commissioner.

"Your Honour and gentlemen of the Court, I have important evidence to give in this case!"

"Who are you?"

"My name is Richard Stephens, son and brother of the prisoners."

He met the officer's keen look steadily.

"Swear him."

Resting his hands lightly on the box-rail, he looked tenderly toward the prisoners.

"Nine years ago, your Honour, I left Chinook Farm to seek what the world had to offer. In many ways I have had good luck, and I count my being here at this moment an act of Divine Providence, for I have come in time to plead guilty to the murder of Albert Benson, to state the reasons, and to *prove* my words!"

"Go—go—go, an' never come back!" mumbled old Jeb pathetically. He did not seem to understand.

Walden listened as to a dream story.

"Asking your indulgence, I will rapidly outline my whereabouts during my absence."

Calmly he took a note-book from his pocket.

"From '96 to '97 I was in Ottawa, as a porter first, then as under-shipper, finally shipper with Stone & Co. Thence I went to Montreal and worked as a shipper for Martin, Littleton, & Son. I left there early in '98 and went to N.Y. The rest of '98, all of '99, and until July 1900, I was in that city in various capacities—successfully."

"In August of that year I went to New Orleans in charge of a new commission concern. I remained in their employ until January 1902; during that time have transacted business in Memphis, Chattanooga,

Mexico, and Charleston, South Carolina. I then started a small company out West in Black Hawk, Montana, where I remained until eleven weeks ago.

"Not having been home in so long, I thought that I would drop in and surprise them at Chinook Farm."

He paused, and put the note-book back in his pocket.

"Leaving the train at Elkins, I hired a horse, and, taking but a change of clothes, as I had only a day to spare, I rode across the prairie." He paused again.

Not a sound but quick excited breathings and the yelp of the wind.

"Gentlemen of the Court, it was a beautiful late June evening, and you can perhaps understand how happy I felt to be returning to my home, burdened with nothing heavier than a clear conscience and a bank-book that showed a respectable account for nine years' work."

"As I rode along in the dusk many familiar landmarks were passed. I even recognised a little cairn of stones that I had built with great care on the highest part of our land when I was a boy. My heart grew lighter and lighter until I fairly sang when I saw the lights of home again after so many years. I eased my horse, so that they should not hear my approach. Here, gentlemen, begins the part of my story that applies to this case."

"Then I heard a scream, and another. I recognised my sister's voice, sprang from the saddle, and rushed towards the stable, whence came the sounds. In the gloom I saw my sister struggling with a man."

"'Damn you!' I heard him say, 'you would have Andy knock me down—would you? Go on,—scream all you like. They're all away at Steadman's dance, and I know it! Haven't I watched and prayed to Hell for this chance. You come with me, my girl—and they'll have a *nice* hunt for you, curse 'em!'

"She screamed again as I reached him, and fell at his horse's feet. Then I struck wildly, gentlemen. He fired at me once, but missed. In an instant he was on his horse and going like mad.

"Possibly you may have heard the expression seeing red?'

"*I* saw red! Leaving my sister where she had fallen, I dashed into the house. The first thing that I saw was Andrew's carbine, and the magazine was full I was not long in mounting. Guided partially by the sound of his horse, who "whistled" badly; and by chance glimpses that I caught of him when the moon shone between clouds, I followed. His horse was fresh, mine worn, but God was kind. Soon he saw me and went faster; suddenly his horse collapsed. He did not lose his seat, and I reined in, jumped off, and fired. He seemed dazed and half turned towards me. I fired again; he sank. I went up to be sure that he was dead, then I dragged him behind a bunch of bush, cut his horse hard with my whip, and made the best time I could back to the farm.

"Scarcely stopping to rest, I saw my sister and explained. She was weak from the brutal attack she had received, and badly bruised. I rode hard—on one of my brother's horses—to Watch Hill, caught a train,

and did not stop till I reached Alaska. There I hid in a mining camp and was blissfully ignorant of all that has transpired until twelve days ago I chanced to get hold of an old newspaper—and—well, here I am!"

A cheer started.

"Silence!" snapped the Commissioner huskily.

"Yes, what else?"

"There is nothing else to add, your Honour, save that I crave your indulgence for whatever those devoted three have sworn or not sworn to. The calculations were that the Corporal would not visit so soon again, and that Andrew would have time to bury the body. Of course, it was certain that Benson would not have divulged his intended whereabouts, bound on such a crime as he was; and nothing would ever have been known more of him.

"I can faintly remember my mother, Gentlemen of the Court. She was the best mother boy ever had. I was ever her favourite—for some reason, and although I cannot remember hearing the words, my father and brother have often told me that they had sworn to her on her death-bed that they would cherish her 'wild laddie'—as she called me—for her memory's sake. They used to add that I was becoming a man fast, and that I must help in looking after Alice.

"What greater heroism could be shown than that shown by them? My sister faced the man she loved the very next morning—weak and ill—bravely. Knowing the torture he was enduring, and suffering herself beyond words, she has kept true to her mother's trust of the 'wild laddie.' You heard her

cry when I came? And my father? A man aged by hard work and long years. Seeing the loss of his all—imprisonment that meant his life, true to the last. My brother—facing death by the noose; has he flinched? You know better than I, gentlemen—That is all!"

He waited.

There was not one dry eye in Court. The Commissioner coughed, spluttered vigorously, shaded his eyes with his hand, consulted hurriedly with the others, then rose.

"I—I scarcely know what to say. This is the strangest case that I have ever known. It needs consideration,—yes—serious consideration, but I—I think that my colleagues agree with me when I order the prisoners discharged?"

They nodded concurrently, hiding their faces.

"And Richard Stephens taken in custody,"—a hush fell on the crowd—"but I will accept \$100 bail!"

In undignified haste he retired.

Chinook Farm, two years later.

A glorious summer's day. Far and away the wheat rolled, bowed and rolled again in the strength of a soft southerly wind. Twirling, rending, bowling along, huge drifts of cloud shot by overhead.

Near the barn, where he could watch the farm hands, sat old Jeb Stephens, his white head nodding cheerily:

"That's right! Go—go—go, *but* come back again! That's right! That's right!"

From the well-house two figures approached.

"There's a letter from Dick!" Howard Walden said.

His wife tried to take it from him laughingly.

"Here, I'll read it."

"How is everything, including the baby? Am well; love,  
DICK."

"Isn't that just like him?" Alice said, pouting.  
"Not a *bit* of news!"

He kissed her, holding her in his arms as though he could never see enough in the depths of her big eyes.

"I must be off to help Andy twitching that stone in the creek bottom."

She waved her hand gaily.

"That's right! That's right!" the old man blinked and smiled—"Go—go—go, *but* come back again! That's right!"

## GOLD AND THE GIRL

### I

SIFTING slowly, the snow dropped through massed pine and fir branches whose myriad needles resolved the heavy flakes into a fine dust that piled higher and higher against the rough bark.

Not a sound broke the wild stillness. A faint breeze that swayed the highest tops was inaudible. Distances were short in the chill grey gloom of the forests and a sable, hopping with its peculiarly arched back, stopped suddenly, listening, then it hurried on, scurrying between the huge trunks. Almost instantly a white fox loped past on the other's trail. It stopped where the sable had paused. Motionless, the slim body seemed as though carved out of snow. Sharp ears cocked forward, bright eyes peering, it hesitated, then swung quickly to the right and melted away in the deep shadows.

The forest floor was deserted. Snow clouds hung low over the Northland, moving sluggishly, threatening to drop their freezing, blinding contents.

The muffled *click-clack—click-clack* of snowshoes

broke the stillness,—far off yet, but approaching rapidly.

An Indian, body bent forward, striding evenly on, appeared as a dim mass that became more and more clear until he stopped where the sable had quickened its pace and the fox turned away to the right.

Swift-Ear leaned his short rifle against a tree, slipped the big pack from his shoulders and examined the tracks carefully, his keen eyes understanding at once.

“An-ha!”

Swiftly he untied the pack. It was full of cured pelts of beaver, sable, and pine marten, but at the bottom were some light steel traps whose chains jingled musically as he untangled them.

Close to the sable's track, by a heavy root that projected over the snow, he set the jagged teeth, scattering snow powder lightly over it until the surface was as even as the rest. Carefully then he worked back to the pack in his own tracks, put it over one shoulder and stole away.

Gradually at first, then faster and faster great flakes drifted from the overburdened clouds, settling with caressing quiet on root, trap, and trails alike, until not a vestige of any disturbance remained.

Hour after hour passed, and still it snowed. Then without an instant's twilight, night closed down, blurring the trunks into one vast barrier of black.

Somewhere beyond a lone wolf howled hungrily. The eerie sound was quickly muffled; its next cry was farther away as the gaunt beast slipped noiselessly onward.

The crushing *swi-i-ish* of a disturbed branch,

relieved of its snow, springing into place again came softly. Then a rough curse and the flare of a match.

"Dam' sacré diable dees\_ting!" 'Cour Partout' Basduque grumbled, scraping the cold bits from his neck. The match died out.

"No nevaire catch heem dees darrk!"

He swore again.

"Attend you! Ah catch bien certain an'!"

His teeth snapped audibly together. Another match glimmered. He broke off a dead pine branch, touched it and a strong light lifted the trunks into grim shape, contorting their shadows. He piled on more wood until the circle of golden light danced flickering wide, and the shadows seemed to move. Partout breathed hard; his big shoulders rose and fell rapidly and he drew the shining sweat often from his forehead.

"B'en, sapristi dat Indian wan diable h'on snow-shoe! go like de caribou so fas'! Ah no know eef he come dees way?"

The trapper's black eyes shone as he stared reflectively into the fire, cutting a piece of bear meat the while. His light pack was behind him, at the foot of a giant pine; he reached for it, lost his balance, and his hand plunged into the snow. There was a faint *tink* of metal. He sprang to his feet. The Indian's sable trap had him by the fingers.

"Bon Dieu, who mak' traps so far Ouest? Ah suppose—hein?"

He sprung the light jaws back, then tossed it back and chuckled grimly.

"To-mor'!—To-mor'!" He glanced at his rifle, then back at the trap.

"*Certain* dat Bon Oreille!"<sup>1</sup> He scrutinized the catch on the short clog thoroughly, then tossed that aside, where it buried itself.

"He go Maqua<sup>2</sup> Mont'n! Tink he get way fom Partout Basduque! Ha!"

Deftly he dug a hole near the blaze, smoothed his fur capote round his body and—having finished his pipe—lay down, feet to the heat.

Imperceptibly the blaze dwindled and the shadows crept closer. Not a breath of wind moved, and the snow had ceased.

Then darkness was absolute once more.

## II

Jack Nelson was in the R.N.W.M. Police outpost at the farther end of the Bear Mountain Pass. Just as the first grey pink line of dawn showed above the snow-line there was an upheaval of blankets in the bunk.

"Snow stopped? Good!" He stretched with a yawn as he stood, stocking-footed, in the low doorway watching the beautiful tints that illuminated the edge of the horizon. The pink grew stronger, reaching up until it coated the lower edges of the last snow clouds that drifted sullenly into the north. A pale green-crimson broadened slowly like a belt over the forest tops, becoming more brilliant in the

<sup>1</sup> Swift Ear.

<sup>2</sup> Bear Mountain.

centre until with a burst of flashing colour the sun appeared.

"Wish I could paint!" he said aloud.

A speck of black, sharp against the dazzling white, at the Upper Slide caught his eyes.

"Wonder who that is at this time of day!"

He watched it apparently crawling down the steep like a fly. Then it vanished into the still, sombre green under the mountain.

"Coming this way anyhow."

He lighted his wee stove, drew on and laced his mocassins, broke the ice in the water-bucket and immersed his head for an instant.

"Wow! That's what wakes a chap!"

The stove droned and the little kettle hissed liquidly. He was comfortably drinking the strong tea when a figure shut out the light.

"How?"

Nelson looked up.

"How?"—then as the newcomer's face showed—"How, Swift-Ear! Where going?" He motioned to a spare tin dipper. "Eat!"

The tall Indian nodded, carefully brushed the snow that clung frozen to the barrel and action of his rifle, stood his pack in the corner, unwound the long muffler, and threw off his big mits. Then he helped himself to the food and ate slowly, his sombre eyes expressionless.

Nelson lighted his pipe and waited.

Brilliantly the sun shone. Canada jays fluttered with shrill squawks to the sill, their shrewd bright eyes looking speculatively at the table. Their blue-grey plumage was bright and gay.

"Soldier of the great White Chief that lives far beyond the wigwam of the Sun, Swift-Ear goes away, for he is afraid!" he said in his own guttural tongue.

"Afraid? Ho! What of? The *Ninivoshi*?"<sup>1</sup>

Nelson laughed.

"Cana'yen—Partout Basduq'."

The Constable's brows contracted. "That rascal again, Swift-Ear? Why does the son of Eagle Child fear the Cana'yen?"

"Death—and as the panther kills—from behind."

"Why?"

Silently the Indian opened his pack, at the sight of which Nelson said approvingly—

"Fine lot of skins! These are all prime beaver, Swift-Ear!"

From the bottom the Indian drew some rough lumps.

"Good Lord, man—gold!" Nelson hurried to the light. "Sure, nuggets, too! Where did you get 'em?"

Swift-Ear smiled sadly.

"Gold! Why is it that the white man sells his spirit, kills, for the yellow pebble that the Indian gives to his squaws to play with?"

Nelson did not answer.

"Any more?"

He held two handfuls of nearly pure gold when the Indian had turned the pack inside out.

"Swift-Ear trusts the white soldier. The Cana'yen knows, and he follows to kill. Two moons gone he

<sup>1</sup> An Indian legendary Evil Spirit.

come on my trail, and Swift-Ear has seen his track every sun. The wolf has heard, the fox smelled, the owl watched him seeking Swift-Ear everywhere. The son of Eagle Child is no coward, but the Great Manitou did not give him eyes in the back of his head."

"I'll see to it that he doesn't harm you!" The constable put his hand on the other's shoulder. "What are you going to do with it?"

"Trade for powder and bullet, flour, traps, at the Great Company,<sup>1</sup> Moose River."

Nelson shrugged his shoulders. "Better leave it with me, I'm going to the line<sup>2</sup> soon, and I'll get the son of Eagle Child full weight in powder, bullets, and flour."

The Indian pondered, staring into the other's eyes. "Good! Swift-Ear trusts—make cache?"

"No need of that; Partout won't bother *me*."

The Indian drew some tobacco from a beaded pouch and began to shred it fine.

Neither saw a figure crouching under the windfall of dead trees at the edge of the little clearing. The jays saw it and chattered angrily.

"Nom de Dieu!" Basduque growled. "Ah have tink dat Police was go h'up countree!" He watched the two in the log hut closely, but he was too far away to distinguish more than the murmur of their voices.

"L'or!<sup>3</sup> L'or!" the Cana'yen whispered. His fingers twitched on the barrel of his rifle, but he was

<sup>1</sup> Hudson Bay trading post.

<sup>2</sup> Railway.

<sup>3</sup> Gold.

afraid of the representative of the King's law—for he knew, and well he knew, that it meant retribution swift and certain to harm him.

He saw the Indian shoulder his pack, put on his snowshoes, shake hands gravely with Nelson, and disappear in the forest to the south.

"Ha! He tinks he los' me yes'day when she come snow!"

Stealthily he backed away until he was deep in the shadows, then stepping wide so that his shoes should not *click* he stole round the clearing until he crossed Swift-Ear's trail. There he listened. A light wind soughed gently with lulling whisperings. With a quick glance on his back trail he slunk on his victim's marks.

Nelson scratched his ear thoughtfully.

"Never knew any of Eagle Child's breed to be afraid of anything!" he muttered. "Swift-Ear must have had the death 'sign' and wouldn't tell me."

His eyes roved across the low, dark green land to where the snow hills rose, looming huge in the glare.

"It's only twelve miles to Slow River Post. I'll just work that way and see if I can locate Basduque. Damn that skunk! I've always suspected him of the Lewis affair."

Whistling softly, he put on his capote, belted his revolver, drew on the thick gauntleted gloves and fur cap, slipped into his snowshoes, latched the door after him, and started off to the north.

On and on he plodded, the snow softening in the sun, making the going hard.

A great white owl, disturbed by his advance, sailed slowly from a low fir.

"Hallo, what's this?"

The charred remains of Swift-Ear's fire met his eyes; he recognised the Indian's track, but there was a strange shoe mark following it.

"By Heaven, Partout's after him *now*! Must have hidden somewhere while Swift-Ear was talking to me!"

Turning to go back he saw a slight figure coming on with difficulty.

The Indian girl did not notice him at first. Her eyes were fixed on the two trails and her breath came in little hoarse gasps.

"Hai yai! Bojou-bojou!"

She stopped, frightened, then came towards him.

"Hast seen Swift-Ear, my brother?"

Nelson saw fatigue in the lissome body, and pain in the big brown eyes.

"He has come and gone, daughter of Eagle Child. When the sun came from its tepee this morning, Swift-Ear spoke many words to me and then he went towards the Great River."

"And the other, white soldier?" She pointed to the Cana'yen's track.

"Him I have not seen. I go to seek now. Will the daughter of Eagle Child follow?"

Silently, save for the *tap-click* of their shoes and the *hiss* of snow, the two slipped through sunlighted shades. With Indian quickness Leaping Fawn discovered where Partout had hidden while watching

the police shack. She pointed to it, then sped on. They found where he had joined Swift-Ear's track.

With a little cry she sank on the snow—exhausted.

"*Death!* Cana'yen will kill as the panther kills. Oh, follow soldier."

She dragged herself to his knees. He picked her up easily, her little body relaxed in his arms. It was but a short distance back to the post. There he put her in his bunk, covered her with the blankets. Her big eyes watched him.

"Don't be frightened, I'll go fast——"

"Like the caribou! Leaping Fawn will come after." Her eyes closed.

"Better take this!" he muttered, catching up his rifle.

Straight the double trail led into the south; now by a frozen brook where the swift water gurgled mysteriously under the ice, then along upper ridges where the hardwood trunks stood less thickly and he could see a long way ahead, he was coasting down a barren when the heavy *spa-ang* of a rifle rang out with startling clearness.

Bounding forward, he shot out on the glare crust.

Across the wide dazzling space he saw three figures; they were strung out one after the other, all moving rapidly towards the dark-green line of the forest beyond.

So intent were they on each other that he gained rapidly without being seen.

"Halt!"

Three faces glanced back at him, then they disappeared among the trunks.

An instant's silence.

*Spa-ang! Cra-ack!*

The two reports rang out almost simultaneously.

He plunged into the cold gloom.

Swift-Ear lay in a heap where he had fallen against a rotting log. To the right, twisting slowly face downward was a figure that Nelson did not recognise. The snow about it was stained a crimson that turned black swiftly.

Not a sign of the Cana'yen.

The constable turned the writhing man over.

"Good Lord, it's Broad Wing! What in the world was he doing here?"

The Indian's eyes opened. He tried to speak; failing, he pointed to Swift-Ear, then to the wound in his own chest, weakly holding up two fingers, then one.

"Where is——"

A heavy weight forced him to his knees. Two powerful hands clutched his throat.

As he went on his face he tried to turn.

"Sacré diable, Partout goin' show to you!"

Senses reeling, helpless in the infuriated Cana'yen's grip, Nelson saw his great tawny head as a distorted thing far away.

Deftly Partout slipped his long muffler round the other's arms, running it round his legs and ankles until he was unable to move.

With a hoarse chuckle the Cana'yen pulled Swift-Ear out flat. The Indian was limp. He kicked the unconscious figure, tearing his pack off. The skins he tossed right and left, and eagerly ran his fingers along the bottom. A look of fierce disappointment

came over his face as he found nothing. The empty pack slipped to the snow; he turned slowly to Nelson, a blaze of fury in his eyes.

"A-a-ah," he snarled, drawing his knife—"you got, hein?"

Nelson shuddered involuntarily, for he saw murder in the trapper's face.

Suddenly a quick movement from a trunk behind Partout caught his attention.

It was the Indian girl. She held up her hand in silent warning.

The temptation to keep his eyes on her was awful, but Nelson knew that the Cana'yen must not suspect anything. He therefore forced himself to watch the trapper.

Slowly—very slowly, Partout rolled up his caribou jacket sleeves, holding the knife between his teeth the while. Then he approached.

"You tell me where you make hide l'or, hein?"

Nelson was silent.

The other grinned.

"No tell?"

He drove the point of the knife into the constable's leg above the knee. The pain was excruciating. Nelson clenched his teeth. Partout had moved round so that the constable could see Leaping Fawn out of the corner of his eye. She was searching Swift-Ear for his knife. It must have fallen somewhere. She looked up, despair in her eyes. Partout dug the knife deeper and gave it a half twist. A groan burst from the constable.

"Dam' toi, tell!"

The girl's eyes sought his. She spread her hands,

palms towards him signifying their emptiness. He looked steadily at Partout's rifle that lay just behind where he had put it down to draw his knife. A flash of understanding came into her face.

Partout jabbed the blade still deeper.

"My God!" Nelson gasped.

How slowly she crept—an inch at a time—towards the rifle!

The Cana'yen was engrossed in his torturing—cursing and growling.

Her hand was on the muzzle. She lifted it. Heavens how slow she was! Her eyes burned brilliantly. Still Partout dug the knife deeper little by little.

"Ah, diable! Ah goin' feenesh toi!" he said hoarsely.

She was upright behind him.

He raised his arm to strike.

Nelson saw the flash of steel and the swing of the black butt at the same time.

A blank expression crossed the trapper's brutal face.

The knife dropped, grazing the constable's throat. Without a sound Partout swayed drunkenly, then toppled on him.

Swiftly Leaping Fawn seized the knife, and before Nelson could protest she had plunged it into the Cana'yen's back. Again and again she struck with all her strength. She left the blade where it struck, and pushed his carcase off the constable.

"The great Manitou is good to thee," she said gravely, freeing him. Her breath came rapidly and the fire in her eyes dimmed; otherwise there

was nothing in her manner to show what she had done.

For an instant she was silent, staring at the dead body of her brother.

She glanced at Broad Wing, who moaned from time to time.

"My father had chosen him for my man," she said simply, then threw back her head, and the long, wild death chant of the Crees came from her lips with undulating cadences. It rose and fell eerily.

When it was finished she knelt beside Swift-Ear, smoothing his long black hair.

Nelson had bandaged Broad Wing's wound as best he could. The gaunt Indian grasped his hand, motioning for him to stoop.

"Soldier brave—come—all—alone. Broad—Wing—will—tell—great—Manitou. Leaping—Fawn—brave too. She cannot—come—into—the wigwam—of—Broad—Wing—now. I go—beyond—the—Eyes of—the—Night—and—the—tepee—of—the—Moon."

He sighed deeply and was still.

Evening gradually deepened, and the skies became mellow in their galaxy of massed colour. The purples and crimsons were angry; along their edges banks of dark grey cloud encroached stealthily. An owl called insistently from the foot-hills across the barren. Another soon answered. They joined in a big pine, and their soft *Hoo—Hoo—Hoo* was lulling.

Nelson ached from his fall, and his leg pained.

"I'll have to take her to Slow River for examina-

tion, and I'm afraid that she'll be sent to Headquarters for killing Basduque."

The girl was looking at him and his heart went out to her pathetic drooping figure. Her long hair fell away, causing the oval face to seem very white. She put her hand on his arm.

"Can the daughter of Eagle Child sleep in the soldier's tepee? She is tired, for the sun has been long in her eyes and—and it is not easy to kill."

He nodded kindly.

"I must lift—them into trees, so that the wolves cannot touch."

She helped him.

At last the three bodies were secure in branch crotches. They started for home. She slipped and stumbled often and he took her hand at the steep places. Not a sign escaped her lips.

A wind grew steadily, and when they came to the log hut it was tugging at them, lashing the loose crust in their faces.

He took off her snowshoes, and she sank wearily on the bunk.

He built up the fire in the stove, and soon placed tea and food before her.

"Miguetch" (thanks), she said softly.

"See here, girl, you saved my life to-day, and——"

"Soldier tried to save my brother; is this not true?"

"Yes, but if you——"

"I am glad!"

She curled on the fragrant boughs, he tucked the blankets about her and she slept.

Long he sat, staring into the half-open door of

the stove, while the wind yowled drearily and myriads of ice particles struck the log walls, rattling against the oiled-paper window.

The gold was ever in his mind. In stocking feet he got it from the corner behind the flour bag. The nuggets shone dull yellow in the feeble light of the lantern.

"\$200 worth here,—or more?"

The Hudson Bay Co. would give *him* their value in money he knew, and he would send it to his mother, back East in Ontario, on the poor little farm that was all his father had had to leave her.

Head between his hands he listened to the wind and night sounds, shivering when in the lulls he heard the wolf-pack chorus.

"Brutes!" he muttered—"Can't reach the bodies, and followed our trail"—as a long howl sounded close by.

He got up with a sigh, hid the nuggets and stood beside the bunk.

A shaft of light fell over the girl's face. She was a rare specimen of typical Indian girlhood. The beaded front of the tanned shirt rose and fell as she breathed through half-opened red lips from beneath which little even white teeth peeped. Her small ankles and feet were crossed in unconscious grace, and her pale cheek nestled in the palm of one hand.

He looked down at her, and a strange feeling came over him—"I don't think that it would be such a hard job to turn 'Squaw-Man' —*for her*," he whispered.

She must have heard, for her big eyes opened,—

meeting his with a faint shyness. He squared his shoulders and turned away without speaking. She did not move.

When he sat down he placed the stool so that his back should be towards the bunk. Pinch at a time he filled his pipe, opened the report book and took his pencil.

"Date?—Oh, yes,—the 12th.—As if it made any earthly difference in this God-forsaken lonely life whether it's the 12th or the 21st."

One by one he made the necessary unimportant entries, viz., time of day, weather, conditions of crust, etc. Then he came to "Description of Crime." He puffed vigorously.

"One Indian, named Swift-Ear, of Eagle Child's tribe, on Upper Slow River. Shot at the base of skull. Death instantaneous.

"One Indian, named Broad Wing, of Knocking Knee's tribe, on West Branch of inlet to Dead Man's Lake. Shot in the back under right shoulder-blade. Bullet ranged to the left passing out under heart. Died 50 minutes later approx.

"One French-Canadian trapper, named 'Partout' Basduque. No regular residence. Stabbed in——"

He stopped, staring at the low black ceiling through clouds of smoke. He looked at the girl. She slept on. Then he carefully erased the last two words, substituting—"Killed by me, Constable Nelson, in the discharge of my duty, for resisting arrest and attempt on my life—That's true, anyway!" he said aloud; the girl moved, but he did not look again.

"Crime committed by?"

Under this heading he wrote :

"Aforesaid 'Partout' Basduque."

In their proper places he noted each thing the dead men had had on them.

He came to Swift-Ear's list: "21 prime sable, 14 prime marten, 16 beaver, 2 white fox, 8 No. 3 traps, ——" he paused,—the familiar little poverty-stricken farmhouse coming before his eyes, with its scant threadbare furniture, its pitifully few chickens, and meagre vegetable garden.

Stealing another glance at the girl, he felt that her beauty was gaining a strong hold over him.

"This *won't* do!"

"And"—he wrote firmly—"19 gold nuggets, worth \$200—\$225 approx."

Under "Remarks" he noted: "Buried Basduque, in a marked gully. Indians' bodies delivered to their respective tribes."

The final heading was "Witnesses."—He printed "None" quickly, and shut the book.

The pipe finished, he spread his fur capote on the rough floor, blew out the lantern. The last thing he heard between the stronger attacks of the wind was the girl's regular breathing.

Neither spoke as he cooked their breakfast.

Outside lowering clouds tore on, but there was not much chance of snow.

He laced her snowshoes and gave her the gold, with a note to the Hudson Bay Factor at Slow River, explaining how they came into his possession, and telling her what to do with them.

She stood close to him.

"Soldier has been good to the daughter of Eagle Child, and she would live in his wigwam. What does he say? Her mother is gone to Manitou and the moons of Eagle Child are dim."

A gust of temptation swept over him.

"Who is to know in this Far North land, and I can——"

He pulled himself together sharply:

"The great White King who lives beyond the wigwam of the Sun would not be pleased if his soldier should take Leaping Fawn into his tepee without having smoked a council pipe with him. Take these"—he gave her a plug of tobacco and some bullets—"to Eagle Child, and say that the soldier will come to his wigwam soon. Let the daughter of Eagle Child *forget* what her eyes saw yesterday and what her hand did."

He looked steadily at her; she did not flinch.

"Leaping Fawn has forgotten."

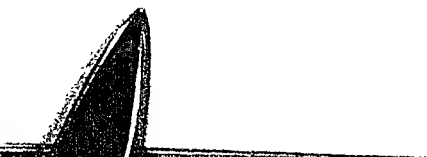
She turned. Irresistibly a craving surged—he took her fiercely in his arms and kissed the red lips.

"Go!"

She looked at him wonderingly. At the first edge she waved her hand and vanished.

Long he watched the spot where the bushes had parted to let her through.

Then he closed the door, and fell to cleaning his weapons, the wind crooning and sighing monotonously.



## THE JESU-MAN

TOUSSAINT BIRON stopped on a long snow-rise to pull his thick muffler tight.

It was a perfect day in the vast wastes. The sun warmed the bitter air with a far-off glow, and its glare was reflected a hundredfold on the endless stretches of white whose scintillating particles burned the eye.

Scarcely a breeze disturbed the infinite quiet; even the eight dogs at his feet seemed content, curled up in a warm mass. His sledge was heavily laden with traps and provisions, for Toussaint was going to attempt that which many other good trappers had attempted, to cross Lac au Serf, find the old Indian trail over the St Honoré Hills, and penetrate into the Lac Noire region, where mink, marten, sable, and fox abounded,—so the Indians had told through generations.

But no Indian would trap there.

Naskesiekookeyaise (Four Sky Thunder) and Kitemakegin (Miserable Man), one the chief of the Barren Crees, the other a medicine man, had told him far on his back trail when he stopped at their camp for the night that the Lac Noire region could never be found by other than one of their tribe.

Toussaint coaxed, bribed, entreated,—in vain. The Indians with peculiar stoic superstition refused to go with him.

They admitted that fur was plenty there, but when he asked why then they would not accompany him on shares, they were silent, till at last the gaunt trapper became angry and hurried away at dawn the following morning.

Kittemakegin watched him disappear into the labyrinth of spruce and pine. Shaking his head solemnly, he went into his tepee again and slept among the squaws.

"Par Dieu, ah goin' show how Toussaint Biron no 'fraid!" the big man muttered, swinging his long arms vigorously.

Far off to the north-west a dim grey line that seemed to touch the skies outlined the St Honoré Hills.

He looked at them chuckling. "Ah goin' find dat traile wat traverse to Lac Noire! Pouf! Lak' see me wat ees dere for mak' scare les Indiens!"

He pulled the caribou thongs more securely over the sledge load, tightened the knots of his snowshoes.

"*Hoop! En avant! Allez!*"

The dogs got to their places and pulled. The sledge moved easily, he following, his snowshoes raising clouds of snow dust that eddied lightly as one foot slipped after the other.

Miles slid by.

Toussaint did not hurry the dogs. He shrewdly calculated that the climb over the hills would tax them to their utmost, therefore he saved them here on the great undulating barrens.

Slowly the sun sank, shedding a cold metallic gleam on the frozen distances. Not golden, not red, merely a chill amber hue that brought out shadows from under the snow hills and crested their tops vividly.

The St Honoré Hills were far distant yet ; Toussaint kept straight on, his course bearing west-north-west.

He was not tired, and the team, because of his care, seemed fresh, pulling strongly.

The click—click—click of his snowshoes became a rhythm in his ears. He strode on mechanically, when suddenly the leader stopped, growling, bristles standing on its shoulders.

"Bo' jou! Bo' jou!"

Toussaint nodded.

An Indian, three dogs and a light sledge with him, stopped.

"Goin' Lak' Noire?" he asked gutturally.

"How you know?"

Toussaint drew off his heavy mits, felt under his grey capote for a pipe and tobacco.

"Smok'?"

"An-ha."

The Indian squatted on the sledge at his feet. Toussaint rested his body against his load. The dogs snarled at one another.

"Me Manachos" (Bad Arrow), the squat Indian announced, puffing slowly on a little red clay pipe.

"W'ere go?" Toussaint looked the other's sledge over carefully, saw that it held traps and food.

Manachos was silent.

"W'ere been?"

The Indian looked up. "Try fin' trail Te-bec-te-ge-sis Noire (Lac Noire)."

"No find?" The trapper pushed his tobacco more firmly in the bowl.

Manachoos shook his head.

"You Cree?"

The other started up, then sat down again.

"Ojibewa-a!"

Silence between the two.

An arctic night hung over everything. The stars seemed brilliantly sharp in the freezing atmosphere, and the long spaces of white dwindled away until they merged as one with the vague horizon.

The northern lights flickered and grew, faded, then flashed into heterogeneous brilliancy.

"Got fire?" Manachoos tapped the ashes from his pipe.

"Si!"

Toussaint undid the lashings of his sledge and pulled out an armful of wood.

"S'posen ah fin' trail to Lac Noire, you go weet me?"

"An-ha!" Manachoos answered.

"You no 'fraid?"

The Indian said nothing.

They dug a hole big enough for two in the snow, and Toussaint put his wood at the north end, where the draught was the strongest.

Pemmican, a dipper of black tea, and a bit of bread they ate and drank together, while the ruddy flames melted the snow walls, and cast red-white reflections on their faces and bodies.

"Why de Cree 'fraid go Lac Noire?"

Manachoos stared into the fire thoughtfully, his black eyes shining.

"You never hear 'bout Te-bec-te-ge-sis Se-nec?"

The trapper was silent.

"Squaw of Kitemagin she drown ter-dac-ga-dis (30 moons) gone. De Cr   dey say dat Ninivoshii no let find Te-bec-te-ge-sis Noire—an' if fin' Mis-sanabie (Indian)—die."

Toussaint's eyebrows drew themselves into a heavy frown. "W'at say 'bout Canayen?"

The Indian puffed on; then—"No, say notting."

The trapper laughed. "An' you no 'fraid go weet me? Plent' fox, beavaire, Ad-ik (caribou), Am-ik (bear); you go, hein?"

"An-ha!"

Manachoos tugged a rabbit-skin blanket from his sledge, rolled himself in it without another word.

Toussaint fed his dogs, then lay down by the sleeping Indian.

The long night passed slowly, each hour's passage accentuated by the shifting evanescence of the northern lights, whose brilliancy grew less and less as the dawn of another day grew timidly out of the East.

Still they slept, and the dogs were quiet as the horizon changed from pale green to yellow, from yellow to deep orange; and then, when the first sun's rays blazoned over the Northland, driving the last night shadows away, Manachoos woke.

His keen eyes swept the horizon towards the St Honor   Hills. They towered in the clear air, one mass of snow and ice. Then he got some wood from his own sledge and started a fire.

"Sun hour in sky," he said, pushing Toussaint with his foot.

"Hein?" The trapper was up instantly.

They had a quick breakfast of pemmican and black tea; then harnessed the dogs and sped on.

Toussaint knew that somewhere between Old Chief's Peak and Wa-ba-boos (White Rabbit) Ledge there was a tiny pass that wound and twisted its way into the hunting basin beyond; and the fact that the Indian had not been able to find it made him all the more careful in keeping his course.

The sun was at noon height when they reached Wa-ba-boos Ledge. They fed the dogs under the shelter of an ice block, then turned north-east, following every indentation of the foothills. All the way to Old Chief's Peak they went, scrutinising every possible pass opening.

Nothing.

The Indian made no comment, following Toussaint doggedly.

Back over the same course.

No success.

Toussaint, when night was coming again, said, "By Gar, ah-fin' to-mor', sure certain!"

When the Indian was asleep, the trapper stole out of his blankets and prayed for a "signe," then watched the scintillating heavens.

Back and forth, now high, then low, the curious lights fell and tossed, rolled and lifted.

Toussaint's gaunt face became sad, for these were but natural phenomena.

As he turned back towards the dying embers of the fire, he saw a reflected flash of light, and turned

just in time to see a huge meteoric star dash across the skies, droop towards the earth, and vanish to the north of Wa-ba-boos Ledge.

"Dat be signe! *Dieu merci!*" and he crossed himself.

Not a word did he say to Manachoo when they started again in the morning.

"Ha! dere ees!" Toussaint shouted after hours of hard travelling.

Hidden by snowdrifts and banks that were piled far above a man's stature, he found the long-sought pass, just north of Wa-ba-boos. It barely admitted his team of three abreast.

The Indian grunted his satisfaction laconically.

On and on and on, past beetling ice, over drifts, through gullies, down inclines, where the dogs held back hard, and up frozen hillocks; the men had to help the brutes.

And then there burst on them a vista of apparently endless pine, spruce and fir forests, interspersed with lakes whose smooth ice shone dark against their snow-bound shores.

"Lac Noire!" Toussaint said gleefully, rubbing his big hands together.

"An-ha."

The Indian looked with awe on this man who had found that which others could not.

They slipped, slid, and coasted down into the Lac Noire basin.

"*Bon Dieu!*" Toussaint exclaimed.

Marten, sable, and fox tracks were everywhere, the indentations of padded feet showing plainly on the sun-softened crust.

Manachoos' eyes glistened, but he made no comment.

They camped by the edge of an open quick water.

That night after supper, when the trees had ceased their whispering, Toussaint filled his pipe and passed the caribou-skin pouch of tobacco to Manachoos.

"We here, hein?"

Manachoos picked a live ember, dropped it on his bowl and smoked.

"Eh b'en, we here?"

"An-ha."

The bronzed, weather-beaten Indian stared at the trapper through the dim haze of smoke that filled their temporary bough lean-to.

"Me no lak," he said.

"Why for?"

"Too much good!" Manachoos answered sententiously.

Toussaint leaned back and laughed.—"You 'fraid!"

The Indian thought, puffing on.

"No 'fraid; onlee tell you we no get back when have lot fur—Amik, Adik, and Ma-quā (bear)."

Manachoos crooned softly, a weird minor chant.

Little by little Toussaint grew more sleepy until he rolled over in his blankets, scattering the embers of his pipe. The Indian carefully put them all out.

During the long still night many inhabitants of this fur paradise got a whiff of a new scent in their nostrils, stole up to the lean-to, snuffing about it, their padded feet thudding on the snow. A marten sat stiffly on its hind legs, little beady eyes glittering;

then came a sable, then a fox. He took one look and hurried away as if on more important business bent!

Crisp and clear the next morning dawned. Every tree seemed clustered with diamonds, and the ice on the banks of the little stream was as limpid as the air.

Toussaint laughed, seeing the tracks of their night visitors—"Attends you! Hein?"—to the Indian.

The latter urged the fire to bright flame whose smoke, blue and feathery, curled upwards among the branches. He looked over his shoulder—

"Goin' try!"—gruffly.

The Canadian could scarcely wait for breakfast, so eager was he to set his traps. He drew them from the sledge with loving care, trying their jaws, examining each link of the chains. There were thirty in all, of the best and lightest make. He used dead-falls for bear and loup-cervier, and, to save cartridges, made rope snares for caribou.

Manachoos, by tacit arrangement, cooked.

"We go togedder firs' day, for see how de countree she is lak', hein Manachoos?"

The Indian nodded.

"By Gar, look dat!" Toussaint whispered, tea-dipper half-way to his mouth.

"Vitesse," the leader of his team, had jumped to her feet, every hair on her spine erect. She did not growl, but held her head high as though trying to scent something. Then she uttered a long wailing cry. Both teams were up in an instant and their voices filled the morning quiet with discordant clamour.

Toussaint reached for his long whip and used it vigorously. He and the Indian looked at one another.

"*You scare?*" Manahoos asked gently.

*Par Dieu, non!—Allons!*"

First one team leading to break trail, then the other, they wound their way through the glorious hunting country. Now and again Manahoos "blazed" the north and south sides of a tree as high as he could reach, as a trail back to their provisions they had left lashed half-way up a spruce that stood near the lean-to.

"Oh, *bon Dieu, bon Dieu!* See wat ees!" Toussaint murmured in ecstasy as they came to the edge of one of the many lakes which they had seen from the hills.

Tracks everywhere; interlacing, crossing each other, deep paths of them.

Manahoos said nothing, but stopped his team and hewed a hole for a marten trap in a huge fir. Farther on Toussaint built a sable run, cunningly tempting, the trap hidden by handfuls of pine needles scattered over it.

All day they worked. When the sun lowered towards the hills beyond, they turned back—every trap set.

On their homeward way they found two martens, one sable, a red fox, and a beaver already taken!

The Indian was silent as the other whooped with delight. Just as the two reached camp the heavens clouded over and snow drifted slowly to earth. At first in scattering flakes, then increasing in numbers

until sight was impossible beyond a few yards. Manachoos piled more boughs on their shelter and built a small one for the teams.

"Wat tink?"

Toussaint's face was grave as when supper was finished a living gale of wind hurtled through the forest, snow-laden. Great soft flakes they were, that blotted out everything.

The Indian lighted his little clay pipe, filled it with red-willow bark—without answering.

"You scare?" he asked again.

The other shook his head,—*"An toi, Pagan, you no 'fraid of dat Ninivoshii?"*

*"No Pagan me, me Jesu-man!"*

The big trapper stared at him,—*"Pries'—de Pries' mak' you Jesu-man?"*

*"An-ha."*

Toussaint thought, then—*"You Indien jus' same; wat Nin'voshii care for Jesu-man?"*

*"Don' know"*—Manachoos stirred in his seat,—*"Da's for why me here een Ninivoshii land,—for see if Pries' good. He say, 'Go Jesu-man, an' no be scare!' Da's all."*

Deeper and deeper, climbing over and about their shelter the snow piled, becoming worse. The fire fought it, but had to give up and died coal by coal, hissing its defiance.

The two men watched the storm, shivered when an exceptionally powerful gust covered them with freezing particles.

They slept from sheer exhaustion.

Toussaint woke first with a sense of a clammy chill. It was dark in the lean-to; yet not quite dark,

for as his eyes became accustomed to it he saw a pale light.

"Dieu de Dieu!" he shouted.

Manachoos sat up.

Snowed in! (And well they knew it.)

By dint of hard digging they got to the upper air. Toussaint burrowed his way to the dogs' shelter. Only a hole showed how the brutes had crawled out. Not one was left.

The snow still fell, quietly pirouetting round him.

"Grace Dieu?" Toussaint crossed himself again.

Manachoos, snowshoes on his feet, pulled himself to the top,—*"Me goin' find dog! If no be back to-mor', you come look for Manachoos!"* he said hoarsely, and was lost in few moments to the Canadian's eyes—going north.

*"Nin'voshii! Nin'voshii!"* Toussaint muttered anxiously when he got back to the snow-bound lean-to.

*"No get back! No get back!"* The Indian's words haunted him.

He prayed as the Jesuits had taught him to pray, and he drew the leather thong with its medallion from his great chest.

The day passed, and another night; snow still falling relentlessly.

*"Ah go fin' Manachoos!"* he decided when daylight forced its way through the flakes.

With pemmican, matches, tea, rifle, and a blanket strapped to his back he started northward, leaving the rest of their provisions half-way up the spruce.

Not a "blaze" could he find. Not a sign or

a vestige of the Indian. The snow, merciless, had covered them all.

Suddenly as he strode on, fear in his heart, he saw a new "blaze" just ahead of him. An opening loomed beyond.

"Dat Manachoos, his signe!" He hesitated, then—"Ah follow heem!" One stride.

"Dieu!" he screamed as he felt himself falling,—falling.

Through the soft yielding mass of a great drift he plunged. Down, still farther down. The more he struggled the deeper he sank. The load on his back held his head down and the snowshoes kept his feet up.

Blood surged to his head; rang in his ears with muffled poundings. He scrabbled with his hands until the cold entered the veins through their bleeding finger-tips. His life-blood tinged the depths an ugly crimson hue, that turned black as it dripped.

"Nin'voshii!" he muttered. Gasping he tried to wriggle over. In vain.

"Nin'voshii no lak'—lak'—Jesu-man."

"What the deuce is this?"—one of the surveying party for the Canadian Northern R. R. asked.

It was full summer in the basin beyond the St Honoré Hills.

"By George they're human bones!—Yes"—the engineer pulled the fox-gnawed bits apart,—“two of 'em at that!—and see here Harry,”—dragging more moss away—“here's their snowshoes!—Just the hoops left!”

"I've heard that the basin was unlucky, according to the Indian legends. Do you remember what the old chap—Kitemakegin, was that his name?—told us?"

"Lord love us, life's too short to bother with their superstitions," the other answered;—"Hi there! You chain-man number two, keep that tape from curling!"

## THE SQUAW BARRENS

"By Gar, ah t'ink goin' mak' snow wan—two—t'ree—hour mabbe!"

Antoine Jobin shut the log-cabin door, fastening it securely with a heavy bar of wood, so that the strong north-east wind that tore viciously through the heavy spruce and fir should not burst it in.

Dull, chilling skies seemed to hang just above the tree-tops, and from time to time the great grey clouds apparently touched them. The air was pregnant with snow-feeling, that curious dampness that permeates the thickest of caribou-skin capotes.

Onésime Jean looked up from his rough stool by the little stove and cracked his long fingers thoughtfully.

"Ver' soon snow taim; las' week see de beavaire cut lot de wood la bas near to Rivière Dansant."

Antoine filled his pipe, humming the while.

Damas Carrière and Jacques Marie Lafrance, who made up the company of four trappers in the lone Northland, said nothing. Damas was busy disentangling a pile of fox and sable traps, and Jacques Marie peered down the barrel of a carbine he was cleaning.

There was no sound in the low interior save for the slight cracklings of the fire and the jingle-jingle of trap chains.

"B'en!"—Antoine said abruptly, "who trap w're?"

The other three shrugged their big shoulders.

"Ah don' care!" Onésime answered; Jacques, Marie, and Damas nodded.

"All sam' bonne place." Damas cracked his fingers again.

Antoine smiled grimly, looking at him.

"Sp'osen den you tak' de Squaw Barren' an' Montaigne au Loup, Damas?"

The latter gave an almost imperceptible shudder.

"Oui"—calmly, without lifting his sombre eyes.

Antoine chuckled.

"An' toi Onésime, you tak' de Bas Traverse an' de Longue Bois, hein?"

"Si-si!"

"Ah goin' hav' Jean Marie wit' me, an' we goin' tak' de territoire w'at ees near to Squaw Barren' an' Rivière Maline; agre'able?"

No one answered, and so their respective trapping-grounds for the season were decided in few words.

A long silence followed, for these men, accustomed only to a lonely wilderness life, its hardships and dangers, its toil and sometimes failures, have not a great vocabulary either in thought or words.

Night was closing its black grip fast, and little shadows crept from their hiding-places in corners from beneath the low moss-packed eaves, even appeared from under the feet of the hewn table legs. Threads of molten gold shone from cracks in

the stove, and the shadows became more bold, growing rapidly until they enveloped everything. Standing out sharply in contrast freshly-made snowshoe hoops seemed big in their whiteness.

Still no one spoke, and the wind in the surrounding vastness of forest lulled little by little, and the water-pail that hung outside on a wooden peg ceased its continual metallic clattering. Antoine rose slowly, gigantic in the gloom, his figure blotting out the dim light that came from the one oiled-paper window.

"T'ink ah go see how sky be look f'om top de beeg pine."

His hand was on the bar of wood when he stopped suddenly.

"Sssh! Leesten!"

Instantly alert, the others raised their heads.

At first scarcely audible, a strange mournful cry stole to their ears.

Damas was on his feet, rigid with excitement—

"Dat de——"

"Sssh!" Antoine whispered.

Again, more drawn out this time, more eerie, the sound rose to a high climax, and died away tone by tone.

Jacques Marie's face quivered and Onésime broke his pipe steam between his teeth.

The heavy breathing of four men — and then again the cry. No nearer, but far more plain. This time the wild notes echoed, mingling with each other, rising, then softly dwindling away until lost in the faint seething of the pine needles in the breeze.

Long they listened.

At last Antoine spoke hoarsely—

"Bon Dieu!" He made the sign of the cross devoutly.

Sweat stood on the faces of the others, and trickled from their chins.

Antoine's hand still rested on the bar; with sudden resolve he drew it back, and went out into the blackness, closing the door after him.

Onésime lighted candles, threw more wood in the stove. The three felt better as the yellow rays drove the greatest of the shadows to their hiding-places again.

With questioning eyes they looked at each other, but they cared not to discuss this that chilled them.

The cry of the wolf, the yelp of foxes at play, the long yowl of the loup-cervier, the muttering growl of the bear, the snarl of the wild-cat, the shrill squeakings of the sable and marten, the clicking of the beaver's teeth they knew, and knew well, but this cry——?

And so, with the superstition of centuries inbred, they, big men, trembled.

Jacques Marie slowly took down a fry-pan, put it on the stove, and threw in some pork and slices of caribou meat.

It filled the air appetisingly.

Damas sat stolidly in his place, but his sombre eyes shone strangely bright.

"Dat ees de Squaw!" he muttered.

Onésime overheard.

"W'at dat?"

Damas cracked his fingers very slowly.

"You no know 'bout de Squaw—'bout d' Indienne on de Barren'?"

"Non! Tell!" Jacques Marie took the pan from the stove.

"Ah heer—long long taim 'go 'bout dees; ol' Chief he tol' to me w'en ah was leetle garçon."

Unheeded the pan of meat and pork chilled to a thick mass, while the candles spluttered and snapped.

"Ah goin' say firs' dat Antoine be no goin' come back, an'——"

"How dat?" Jacques Marie leaped towards the door—

Damas lifted his heavy lids—

"No. come back, ah say! Ah have nevaire hear de Squaw teel dees night, mais ah know b'en sure dat she ees la bas; she mak' man go h'out an' she tak' heem weet her;—das w'at de ol' Chief he tol' me!"

Jacques Marie laughed incredulously—

"Sacr-r-é, dat bon storee!"

Damas jumped up—

"Come den!"

The wind had all gone; the giant trees were motionless. Over all clustered grey-black masses of cloud.

Candle in hand, Damas led the way over to the tree Antoine had mentioned. This was the "Big Pine." They saw where he had clambered the lower branches; they followed, leaving Onésime at its foot. Branch by branch they searched the tree to its very pot. Not a vestige of Antoine.

They called, and the long trapper's cry carried far into the wilderness. No answer.

Very slowly the three went back to the hut.

Supper was forgotten, everything in their lives paled to nothingness when compared to this.

They barred the door again and crept to their boughed bunks, each whispering his Ave Maria.

When Antoine had closed the door after him, he felt an impulse to discover the source of that wild cry.

"Ah say ah go Beeg Pine;—ah go dere now!"

He climbed to the top nimbly, looked round the threatening heavens.

"Snow ver' queeck!" he ejaculated.

And then he heard—

"Antoine, come weet me!"

"Holla! who ees?"

It was a woman's clear voice that answered gently.

"Ah'm near to you, Antoine, come weet me!"

"You los' hein? Ah come tak' you au camp!"

He let himself down from limb to limb, until he reached the ground again; then he searched the deep darkness.

"Holla!"

"Ah am here, Antoine; come."

"Attends! Vait minute!" he called.

Thus following, calling to her to wait, he followed blindly, with her voice ever just ahead of him.

"De camp ees not dees vay," he shouted after a time.

"Si—si," the voice came back—"dees vay."

Furious with himself that he could not catch her, Antoine rushed on until the great length of Barrens

met his eyes. They stretched away, lost in deep gloom.

"Ah am here, Antoine, sauf' me?"

"Ah come!" He plunged ahead.

And then the threatened snow came in shifting, sifting masses, blotting out the dark lines of trees beyond,—bewildered him.

Her voice seemed all about. East, north, west, and south he pursued it without success; yet it seemed so close to him. Doggedly now he followed, intent on his purpose to find the lost woman.

At last he became tired and lay down under a scrub fir. Worn out, he was soon asleep while the snow piled about his shelter and the bitter sting of a heavy frost numbed his unconscious limbs.

"Who ees?"—Jacques Marie asked when daylight stole into the cabin. "Antoine?"

The blanketed figure squatted by the stove answered gruffly, "Ah-tah-kah-koop" (Star Blanket). It stood up tall and gaunt.

"W'ere Antoine Jobin?"

They told him of his disappearance.

"He gone wit' Ninivoshii Squaw" (Squaw of the Barrens).

Damas muttered something, while the Indian filled his pipe.

"Long moons gone white man leave Squaw for die wit' papoose. She swear by Manitou to kill white mens."—The stoic features changed fiercely—"She kill many yet, an' more will kill!"

Jacques Marie laughed, Onésime smiled—

"Ah non; he gone-look see good place for de trap!"

Star Blanket got up swiftly.

"De Ninivoshii Squaw alway get—Follow!"

Impelled—why they knew not—the three put on their snowshoes and followed.

Hours later they reached the Squaw Barrens.

Unerringly Star Blanket searched the snow-covered surface.

"Dees Ninivoshii Squaw track!" he whispered, pointing to a light disturbance of the feathery snow.

They found him. A longing look was on the frozen features; but strangely enough something had closed Antoine Jobin's eyes, and tiny marks on the seed-snow showed where something had moved about his body.

Ah-tah-kah-koop looked at the three that stared.

"Ninivoshii Squaw!" he said gutturally—"Bo' jou, Bo' jou," and strode away towards the east, where the sun slowly climbed its way into the heavens of a freezing north.

## GOD'S MERCY

### I

"*Vast* heaving, you swab!"

Skipper Ben Thomson, huge in his sou'-westers, eyed the Irish donkey-engine driver on the dock wrathfully.

"Say, what d'ye think you're doing anyhow? Trying to tear the hatch coamin' off'n this craft?"

Tim M'Murtry spat vigorously into the oily, black, ice-laden water.

"Oi dunno?" he muttered, watching the other carefully, lest a belaying-pin or a loose block should hurtle his way.

The skipper turned, cursing all the Irishmen ever invented.

"T" Wharf at Boston was deserted save for an occasional belated fisherman, who, with his oil-clothes fastened tightly under his chin, hurried along the fish-slimes string-pieces, picking a tortuous path between boxes of cod and barrels of oil, whose reek filled the bitter cold air with suggestions of snow-driven seas and gigantic surge.

A raw wind whined in from off the Harbour, soughing desolately among the forest of spars that lined the long wharf. Halliards and running gear flapped and shook drearily, while the empty decks of fishing-schooners shone sickly grey in the waning light of a December day.

From behind, the clang of trolley-car gongs came frequently, and at times an in-coming liner's siren screamed with pulsating clearness from the haze of snow and fog that obliterated the lower bay.

The last quintal of fish was on the dock. Alone, Skipper Ben threw the hatch covers on, drew their canvas tops over, and made all snug. Then he went aft and let himself down the narrow companion into the cabin.

It was roomy enough, and the quaint stove, that was braced into a semblance of solidity by a rusty harpoon iron, gave out a welcome hot drone.

Pictures from illustrated papers, a photograph or two, a chart of the run from Boston Light to Cape Race, Newfoundland, with the bearings marked in red pencil, a lantern, and the ever-present barometer were the sole attempts at decoration. Clusters of bad-weather clothes lay tumbled in the lower bunks, a heterogeneous mass of boots, mits, and grimy blankets. The smell of tar and cod saturated the interior.

"A—damned—terrible—trip!" Thomson sobbed aloud as he took a bottle of Miquelon rum from a locker, half-filled the cracked tumbler, and swallowed it. "God's mercy's against me!"

He sat quiet, his weary blue eyes sadly staring into space, the broad shoulders drooping.

"A damned terrible trip!" he sobbed. "Two dories gone. My lad, *my* Ted with 'em."

A pause, while the wee stove, strengthened by the draught, crackled fiercely.

"Ted"—barely whispering the name—"aye, *my* Ted, and day after to-morrer's Christmas!"

Above his head the monotonous *tap-tap-tap* of a loose sheet rope sounded. He began to count mechanically. Of a sudden he sprang up, knocking over the lantern. "The devil's curse on them hell-hound liners!" he groaned. "A-tearin' across the Banks with their music and their lights. *They* don't hear the doryman's yelp of death when thirty-thousand tons of steel puts him down—and if they did, they wouldn't care. I 'most heard the crash when Ted was struck; *he* didn't have no time to sing out, and God help him—I almost thought as I could see the look on his face when she loomed out 'n the fog on top of him."

He was silent again, and the cabin grew darker and darker.

A tap on the companion door. Apparently the skipper did not hear. It opened carefully, and the blue, pinched face of the donkey-engine driver peered at the bent figure.

"What is it, Tim? Same old story? Why don't ye go home a stinkin' night like this?"

The toil-warped form came below slowly, dirty cap in hand.

"Sure, Cap'n, the woife is bad wid drink agin,

an' there's niver wan blessed mout'ful o' vittles in th' shack, an' she troied t' do fer me!" He turned his head and showed a long gash under the hair—"Fire shovel, sor," he explained gently.

Thomson nodded, pointing to the bottle.

"An' thank ye kindly, Cap'n, but oi have troubles enough now!"

With the dull ache of misery eating his soul out, Ben told the unhappy Irishman about his boy Ted, and of his death on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. He told it stonily, the days of merciless pain having dulled the stab of words.

"And I haven't told his mother yet, Tim: you see we got in yesterday, and day after to-morrer's Christmas, so I kind o' thought I'd say nothin' till after, and I tells her that Ted's aboard Jim Wilson's *Wanderer*; d'ye see?" he finished.

"'Tis a sad day fur ye, troth-an'-all—a sad day." The Irishman rubbed his scarred hands close to the stove. "Faix," he said softly—so softly that the big skipper looked up—"an' 'tis wishin', Tim M'Murtry is, that he'd a-bin in th' doory instid o' Ted!"

The sincere, rough sympathy was too much for his overwrought nerves; heavy drops fell one by one from Ben's chin to the floor.

"I didn't think any one but a father could understand, Tim."

A pause then. "Oi was a father too—wanst—yis, wanst;" he said again, "wanst."

The years of unremitting toil, with poor food,

years of sleepless nights, had drabbed Tim's face to the colour of grey moss. He moved and talked with the automatic precision of his engine, and its rhythmic *tinkety-tonk, tinkety-tonk*, seemed echoed in his voice.

The other's being breathed of the salt of the sea, and his powerful features were deep-bronzed, glowing with the quick blood beneath.

"I'm going home, Tim," the skipper said. "Ye kin sleep here if you like. Mind the lantern, and there's some cheese, bread, and cold 'horse' in the galley. Good-night."

He was gone before the Irishman could speak.

For a long time Tim sat on watching the dying coals. Then he ate.

That night an earnest prayer went out from the cabin of the *Flying Star*, for Tim was a good Catholic.

## II

"She's a-going to come nasty close to us, Jack!" Ted Thomson yelled to his dory companion, as the threatening bellow of a monster steam blast roared out of the fog.

Both men looked anxiously to starboard, where the deep-breasted seas rolled away into the thick grey unseen.

Lines covered one end of the dory, and in the well a pile of cod slid to and fro as the small craft tilted.

"Clatter up, Ted!"

The latter grabbed a horn and blew it lustily, but the sound seemed to cling round them as if unable to pierce the opaqueness.

"My God! Swim out, ye——" With a downward swoop the mountain-high bows of the great liner snuffed out the dory. Just a slight crackling sound was heard by the look-out, who, peering over the side, saw nothing, therefore, said nothing.

The Herr Capitan was smoking in his cosy private sitting-room under the bridge.

Opposite him sat an important official.

"Don'd be nerrvous, mein Herr, dere is only shmall boads aboud here, *und* we run half-quick-ness, you know!"

He looked at the other, and just then his steward handed in a slip.

"Ach so!" he whispered. "Twendy-dree *und* half!"

### III

Skipper Ben pushed the back door open wearily and entered the kitchen of his small neat home in Gloucester.

"Hello, daddy!" a youngster of twelve years shouted, running towards him. "Any Christmas presents yet?"

"To-morrow, son, to-morrow," the big man answered, going upstairs heavily.

In his own room he shut the door, went to the bureau and took from it a photograph of a young

man in his painfully correct "Sunday clothes." Long and hard he stared at it, as though waiting for it to speak, then put it down with a choking sob and flung himself on the bed, crushing the bolster in his hands.

The door opened softly.

"Tired, Pa?"

All in grey, a little cap tied over her prematurely whitening hair, his wife tiptoed to him.

By force of will he pulled himself together.

"Yes, Mary; hard work to get the fish ashore."

She saw his reddened eyes and sat beside him.

"Don't take on so about—about the men, Ben. It's all God's will—you couldn't help it. I've been and seen Fred's wife and Jerry's; the other man was from Nova Scotia, didn't you say?"

He nodded, choking inwardly.

"See, then," she said quietly, "how good God is to us. It might have—might have been Ted!"

With a groan he turned his head away.

"Come down and see the Tree and fixings I got for the boys; come, there's a good man."

He shook his head and lay still.

Wonderingly she left him. Not the slightest suspicion entered her mind: he had never concealed anything from her in his life.

Mrs Blendell, a neighbour, was ensconced by the range when she reached the kitchen, and her admiration of the Tree was great; Mrs Thomson proudly showing her various presents the while, and the lad of twelve trying to peep through the crack in a panel of the door.

"See," the mother said, "here's a pair of those new-

fangled double-soled sea boots for Ted. I saw 'em advertised at Marsh's. They cost twelve dollars and a quarter!"

"My gracious!" the other gasped. "Twelve and a quarter, did you say, Mary?"

"Mm—mm; and here's some heavy Scotch wool socks I knitted, and a double-thick jersey, and an extra long reefer, and a new toothbrush."

"Goodness, if he falls overboard with all them on he'll be drowned!"

The mother laughed. "Why, you couldn't drown Ted—he's like a fish. And I got him a new Bible: his is most wore out, and smells terrible fishy; I seen it in his bunk afore they started on the last trip."

"Well, I must be goin'. When's Ted comin' back?"

"Round New Year, Ben says; he's on the *Wanderer* with Jim Wilson; got caught aboard in the fog, and Ben couldn't find Jim afterwards to take him off. We'll miss him terrible day after to-morrow; I somehow feels he's more mine than the others, Kate, and he's always been such a good son to Ben and me. Going? Have a cup of coffee and a bite of cake? No? Good-night, then. Come over Christmas in th' evening!"

Rarely beautiful was Christmas day. The air tingled briskly, its invigoration causing blood to race through veins, and the humanity of Gloucester to be glad that they were alive. With solemn cadence the town steeples sent out their musical chimes. Far down the harbour on Brackett's Reef the light-

keeper heard them as they floated softly to him over the sparkling waters. He stopped his energetic rubbing of the huge lenses, and looked wistfully towards the dim outline of houses.

"Many years ago t'-day Christ was born," he said aloud.

A steady breeze sang round the upper platform, to the *lap, lap, lap*, of iced water below. "He was born fer us the Book says, and He died fer us, so we c'uld be happy; an' by gum, ef that fool Ezra don't git drunk on th' strength of the Day and furgit to relieve me, I'll be ashore an' happy this night, or my name ain't what it is!"

He fell to polishing again lustily, while the gulls skimmed, wide-winged, over the grey-blue, their reflections curiously distorted.

Rolling down Gloucester's main street, skippers hailed one another cheerily. "Avast there, Alec! Greetin's to ye, ye old moss-bunker!"

"Stow that, John. Belay yer compliments; but a Merry Christmas to ye just the same!"

Old Jephson Murany, Gloucester's most venerable skipper, hove in sight, a cluster of children about him, tugging at his coat tails. By one hand he pulled a sled freighted with three youngsters; the other was busy warding off a snowball onslaught. "Stan' by t' repel boarders!" he roared.

With shouts of laughter every skipper within hearing rushed to his rescue. They formed a barricade, and Murany fluttered a stars-and-stripes handkerchief in the breeze. "'Strike, if ye must, this old grey head; but spare your country's flag,' he said. 'March on!'"

"All yourn, Jephson?" somebody asked.

Murany drew himself up stiffly. "Wall, I was what ye *might* call their prime instigator!"

And so the hours of Christmas Day slid rapidly into the past. There were Trees beyond number, greetings without end.

But there was one skipper that sat by his open window looking seaward, with no joy in his heavy eyes, and whose mouth was drawn by pain.

"Ted! Oh, my lad, my lad!"

Stretching away, dancing with myriad light points under a blue sky, the great ocean met a clean horizon gaily. Down by the docks a troop of gulls wheeled and circled, now and again plunging at the water, their pinions seeming a dazzling white in the sun.

Far away to the north-west a long low line of black showed some swift liner's trail, and a smudge against the blue to the south'ard told of a tramp drudging stolidly in past Boston Light.

He cursed the first and unconsciously watched the other. Her dirty brown smoke that came from the lone funnel had a fascination for him that he could not understand. He watched the smudge rise in thick clouds, saw it scattered by the wind, and waited for the stokers to fire up again. Her hull passed out of his ken; but he watched the smoke that told of her creeping progress to Boston.

"Slow things!" he muttered. "Why, the *Star* can *sail* all round 'em, and yet they make good money and don't do no harm."

"Coming, Pa? They're all a-waitin'. Oh, Ben! Why'd you put on them old black clothes?—you

haven't worn 'em since mamma died—and a black tie? Didn't you like the red one I made?" his wife asked, reproach in her kind brown eyes.

He got up, gazed at himself in the mirror, straightened the black "tie," unbuttoned and rebuttoned his coat. He looked at his wife, stuttered, coughed hard:

"Yes; but ye see, Mary, I—I—I got this one on fust, and—and I can't git it off, blame it!"

"Let me help you!" She started forward. He brushed her aside hurriedly:

"Let be; let be."

Together they went down the bright stairway.

"Merry Christmas, Ben!" a group shouted. He answered them cheerily, forcing a semblance of gladness into his voice

Then his torture began.

"Great pump-handles!" ejaculated Ebenezer Whaley. "Look at th' boots fer Ted!"

"Lay on to that reefer! Ain't it a *snorter*? That's fer him too!" Bill Benson roared through his red moustaches and little "Uncle" Devon picked up the jersey, felt it all over, whistled sharply: "No—no—no—(whistle) body ever ma—ma—ma—(whistle)—de *me* such—such—a—fine—jer—jer—jer—(whistle)—sey's that!"

"You always wuz ugly, Uncle!" somebody shouted.

The little old man transfixed the speaker with a glare. "Go—go—go (whistle) an'—look—in—the—glass. If ye ai—ai—ai—(whistle)—n't scared to death 't ai—ai—ai—(whistle)—n't my fa—fau—lt!"

The cottage shook with the rumble of laughter.

And so it went all through an endless afternoon and evening, while Skipper Ben's heart was bursting.

He ground his teeth, broke two hard-rubber pipe stems in his agony, but hung on for the sake of his wife, who was so happy, and who, now and again, would put her hand in his, and "only wish that Ted was here."

At last he could bear no more. He hid away in his room while his guests made merry round the Tree.

Riding lights twinkled off the foreshore, and a crisp moon-crescent hung nearly inverted in a blue-black sky, shining coldly on a quiescent sea that rhythmically rumbled on to the beach, then receded to the accompaniment of rolling shingle and the *swsssh* of dragged seaweed.

Tears came in torrents, their strength causing him to shake from head to foot.

"Ted, my lad, my lad!" he repeated.

"Oh, Ben, what is it, dear man?" She had seen him sneak away from their guests.

"Ted, my lad, my lad!" was his only answer.

Suddenly a wide horror came into her eyes. She shook his great bulk. "Tell me, Ben, as you believe in God, is Ted on the *Wanderer*?"

He did not answer.

Her face went white, and her heart almost stopped; she felt as though she were strangling.

A knock, heavy and loud, below—

"Ahoy! Ahoy, Ma!"

"Ted?" the skipper said dazedly.

"Of course, Ted!" she screamed, running down, he following as one in a dream.

But an instant, and she was in young, brawny arms.

"Merry Christmas, Ted! Hurray for the *Wanderer*! How d'ye get here so soon?" the guests sang out.

Ted, in an ill-fitting suit of clothes, stared at them.

"*Wanderer*! Why, Jim's 'way out on th' North Bank!" (He could not understand Skipper Ben's head-shakings.)

"I was picked up by th' *Ben Nevis*, an'——"

"What?" old Jephson asked; "picked up by who?"

Skipper Thomson stood into the breach bravely.

"My boy's *here*!"—there was a strange quiver in his voice—"thank God' fur it; maybe he'll tell his own story—eh, Ted, boy?"

The mother's eyes caught the father's, but neither spoke.

"Yarn, Ted! Yarn!"

Tall, lanky, and grim in the fast dwindling light of the Christmas-tree candles, Ted squatted on a stool by his mother.

"My Ted, my *own* Ted!" she whispered over and over again, stroking the bronzed hand that lay in her lap.

They were all quiet.

"I—I—I" (whistle)——

"Shut up!" said the Skipper briefly; "all hands stow their gab whilst Ted spins the yarn. Let her go, lad."

"You remember what Jack said as we shoved off from the *Star*, Dad?—that mornin'?"

"Aye, an' well do I!"

"*Whut* d'he say?" Ebediah asked, as though he were cross-examining a witness. Ebediah prided himself on his shrewdness, and, when ashore, daily attended the Gloucester Court, where he offered advice and laid down what he called "high sea" law gratuitously.

"'Old man,' said he to Dad, 'my bally bloomin' luck's no good this 'ere trip! Ain't done my grub's worth o' fish, an' strike me dead if I thinks as how I'm a-goin ter see another Christmas!'"

"Poor f-f-f-f (whistle) feller!" "Uncle" shifted his quid to the other side of his face, then looked round pleadingly for a spittoon; seeing none, he miserably swallowed.

"Jack come to the *Star* from Novy Scotia, but he was an Englishman an' had fished on the Dog-er-Hell Banks, 'r some such place. He was always full of yarns, warn't he, Dad?—an' good ones. Well, we laughed at him 'cause he was continuool croakin' about his bad luck, and tellin' what brave things he'd done in Indy and Chiny, an' as how he'd oughter have the Victory Cross."

Ted coughed and winked hard.

"So me an' him pulled away to th' nor'ard with plenty o' bait an' five tubs o' lines.

"It was pretty nigh onto calm, but a long snaky swell a-heaved in from th' east-nor'-east, and th' horizon looked kind o' grim an' musty, like a ceilin' that hadn't been swept for a long spell. We pulls along easy. Sudden Jack pipes up: 'Ted, look at th' wake o' th' oars!' I hadn't noticed anythin' special, but lookin' closter I seen there warn't no bubbles—leastways just a few, the holes runnin'

down deep and ugly, then shuttin' up smooth, like oil. 'That means fog an' blow, s' help me!' says Jack. I didn't think much of it, 'cause Jack always *was* a croaker, an' we warn't no more 'n two mile from the *Star* nohow. Well, we pulled ahead 'nother mile or so, then stuck out our sea drag, baited up and hove over. 'Twarn't long afore Jack hauls in two big ones; I follers suit with a couple more, an' fer near on three hours it was bait-an'-haul *lively*!"

"My! My!" Ebediah muttered,—“pretty near well-full, eh?”

"We was that, when I chanced to take a spell to light my pipe, an' a curious feelin' come over me. There warn't a breath of wind; by damn, mates"—Ted spread his hands out over the silent group in the tiny room,—“it was *stiller* 'n a dead calm. There warn't no sound 'xcept th' slidin' o' th' cod in th' well an' the heavy thumps o' their heads when they fetched up agin' th' sides. I never felt so lonesome in all my days, even with Jack a-haulin' aside me, an' the *Star's* tops'ls a-showin' sickly and green-like astarn o' us. Jack, he strikes up a song, an' I'll never forget it. It ended:

'Oh, it's Tommie this, an' Tommie that,  
An' Tommie fall behind,  
But it's Please to walk in front, sir,  
When there's trouble in the wind.'

"An' then th' fog struck us! There warn't no warnin', not a sound; it just dropped down, so thick I couldn't see th' bow o' th' dory."

"Terrible awful — fog! I know!" Ebediah whispered.

"'Twas like a death-sheet, mates. I've seen fogs afore, many of 'em; but that Tuesday mornin' it grabbed us by the seat o' our breeches an' seemed like to *hug us close*. Fish? Lord, mates, I had no more idea o' heavin' lines than—than I had o' flyin'!"

Ebediah forgot to chew; "Uncle" stopped his quiet rocking, the Skipper's eyes never left his son's face.

"Well, sonny?" says Jack. "Yes?" says I, stupid-like. "She's on us," says he—"an' bly'me but ye'd better sound th' horn; I'll in th' anchor,"—which he did, whilst I blew for all I could. Twic't we heard the *Star's* horn, an' we was a-makin' headway when Jack holds up his hand. Fust-off I couldn't hear nothin', then a kind o' hiss'n' rumble come out o' th' nor'ard. "Out with the bloomin' fish!" says he, an' out they went, a-slitherin' an' a-slidin' through the slimy water. "Into th' stern, quick!" he yells. I jumps aft,—an' th' wind struck us, he havin' let the drag go by th' board agin."

There wasn't a sound in the little close room.

"Inside o' five minutes, Dad, th' seas were top-high an' rollin' wild, th' gale a-cuttin' off their tops an' a-tossin' 'em inboard, an' th' fog holdin' on tight.

"Never had no luck no-how!" says Jack, as him an' me bailed jig-time.

"We was a-huddled up, th' seas drivin' over us. I blowed th' horn, but even *us* couldn't hear it; when from out'en th' Hell to th' nor'-east we heard th' beller o' a liner's siren. Jack grabs our horn, jumps 'midships an'——" Ted stopped for an instant

—"she come down on us like lightin'. My God, mates, her bows stood over us like a black mountain." Ted stopped again. "'Swim out, ye fool! My leg's foul!' I heard, as Jack grabs me under th' arms an' chucks me over. As I was a-goin' down, furever it seemed like to me, I felt th' poundin' o' her screws in th' water, an' I swum fur God's sake to get clear; an' then I come up.

"There warn't nothin' afloat but me.

"I could hear th' big siren a-blowin' further and further to th' sou'-west, an' me a-paddlin' to keep my mouth free. I seen something glistenin', an' I makes a grab fer it. Just a thwart from the dory, but I gits it under my chest. Then 'twas all quiet 'xcept fur th' lashin' o' th' spray an' th' holler o' th' wind. God knows how long I struggled agin' goin' to Davy Jones; Skipper Oldham o' the *Ben Nevis*, tramp out o' Hartlepool for Boston, says maybe two hours, but it seemed yeàrs to me, fightin' all alone. He was steamin' along careful—'bout seven knots 'cause o' th' fog—an' his look-out seen me. I don't remember their lowerin' a boat, nor do I remember bein' took aboard. First thing I knowed I was starin' up into a strange face from a strange bunk, an' I was scared till Oldham spoke, a-thinkin' it must be some other world, as I never heard tell o' a doryman bein' saved in such weather, and I hadn't furgot the terrible feelin' of goin' down, down, down, th' water roarin' in my ears. He says I called out fur Jack all th' time, an' they rowed round fur a spell but found nothing, only a few pieces o' th' dory's plankin', an' one oar."

The mother's handkerchief hid her face as Ted finished. Ebediah forgot to cross-examine, and Skipper Thomson was gazing fixedly out over the moon-shimmering steely sea that heaved and rolled, pulsating evenly. In the ray-track of cold light a big schooner showed clear, standing in for harbour with everything set. Her sails were as moulded grey things against the blue dim vaults beyond. Like a wraith she slipped into darkness again, and the moon track was clear.

"The lives you take of ours who only want ter live," Skipper Ben said slowly to the great waters. "Jack Fraser, the 'croak,' to save my lad!" His head sank forward. "God's will be done."

Mirth and laughter had forsaken the little Christmas party. The fear of God and a new respect and wonder at His ways took their place.

With muttered words of congratulation and thanks, their guests went out into the glittering night.

"Ted, my—my—my (whistle) man, never ge—ge—ge (whistle) get—your—leg fou—fou—fou (whistle) foul in—a—dory!" "Uncle" wound his woollen muffler tightly round his neck. "An'—an'—an' (whistle) Ted, you—you remem—remem—(whistle) remember—to—say a—a—a—(whistle) few—good wor—wor—wor (whistle) words—fur—Jack to—to—to (whistle) to-night!"

They were all gone.

Mother, father, and son stood before the tiny Tree; then Ted awkwardly clattered up the neat stairway and the cottage was still.

She turned to Ben. "Pa, why did you tell me my boy was on the *Wanderer*? I'd have to have been told the—the truth," she said softly, putting her hands in his great rough ones.

"Mary, I thought I'd let you have your last *happy* Christmas, knowin' how much you loved the lad, and——"

"*You* could see it all, hear my thoughts of him," she interrupted, "feel of the little things I'd bought for him, keep a smiling face, when——"

He seized her by the shoulders roughly. "Aye," he said, and she looked up at him, startled—"Aye, when I could *see* him floatin', driftin', lurching on the seas, drowned, dead, except for his soul. And he was mine, *my* lad, *my* son."

"*Why*, Ben?"

He looked down at her small, worn figure, into her brown eyes. "You, my girl; I *couldn't* break your heart then,—just acause mine was broken, could I?"

Without a word she crept into his big arms.

Then tacitly they knelt by the chintz sofa, and Skipper Ben Thomson, of the *Flying Star*, prayed:

"Thanks, God, for Your Almighty kindness in savin' my lad. We who stretch our keels over the seas of the world have nobody to turn to but You, nobody to hold out a helpin' hand, nobody to throw us a life-belt, but You. Sometimes an' often, you take us, Lord, but we ask no questions, for You say in the Book that not a sparrer can fall but what you know about it. Considerin' this as so, we, Mary and me, do humbly beg of You to take Jack Fraser's soul into the Kingdom of Heaven; for Jack saved

my lad just as much as You saved Your Son. Amen."

Gloucester was still, save for the sodden liquid murmur of the sea breaking on the shingle of the beach, and skipper Ben Thomson slept soundly, for he had seen the mercy of God.

## THE PILOT OF THE *FLYING STAR*

### I

"GREAT weather,—*grand!*" Skipper Ben said aloud, as he rose out of the companion way.

The *Flying Star*, under easy sail, rose and fell dreamily on the long unbroken swell that heaved down the east shore of Newfoundland. In the far distance to port, mountains rose dimly as vague grey outlines against the cloudless sky of dawn over which veils of softer diffused light stole slowly. Pale pink and purple over the heights' edge, and above them a gradually darkening yellow that merged into amber and a greenish blue.

Scarcely a breeze fanned the rolling waters whose vast expanse stretched away to the beyond,—one long unbroken line of subdued strength.

The squeaks of the rudder-post was regular as the wheel played loosely in the helmsmen's hands, and the *chuck-thump* of water driving up the channel was softly muffled. A lone gull fluttered low to the schooner's counter, hungrily waiting for cook to heave over his bucket.

Tailing astern, sixteen dories bobbed and jerked

at their painters, following the schooner like a lot of young chicks.

Ben filled his old pipe, then, having rubbed the head of the match in his hair, as the sulphur was damp, he hauled his long legs on deck and sat down.

"Seen anything, morning watch, Nick?"

"Nothin' special, Cap'n;—there was a steamer goin' north passed us 'bout one bell; looked as 't might a' been the mail boat bound for White Bay."

"Just so, just so; she left St Johns yisterday afore noon;—nothin' off shore?"

The other shook his head.

"Wall, guess we'd oughter be seein' some of the Gloucester crowd to-day; fish is good on th' West Bank now, and gettin' better. 'Nother ten days 'll see us a-settin' a course fur home if we keep on th' way we've been a-doin'."

"That's 'bout right, I reckon too."

It was Sunday, and the men for'ard did not stir until the sun shot up out of the water with a dazzling burst of golden crimson and a flare of heat. Its rays lighted on a pinnaced iceberg to the south'ard, and reflected from the cold mass with diamond brilliance that swayed slowly as the berg moved.

"Mornin', Skipper!" The mate's tousled head appeared,— "It's goin' to be a flat ca-alm; what a day fur fishin'," he said mournfully.

"Remember the Sabbath," Thomson began reprovingly, but Atkins had dropped out of sight. He "wasn't much on religion nohow," and could not understand the Skipper's Sunday personality; every

day looked alike to him so long as there were fish to be had.

Sounds of life filled the schooner. Cook shook down his range and sung out for water, while for'ard the men were "sousing" each other for a Sunday wash.


The lone gull almost came aboard in its search for food. Cook looked up—

"Say, Mike, you just wait a minute, will ye? Never seen such a bird for hurry!"

Cook was "Mike's" special friend, as it was nearly a week since he had first appeared off the *Star's* counter, and there he had stayed. On still nights the bird would light close by, and his call was the first warning the watch had of coming dawn.

"Seems actual to know cook, don't he?" Nick said ruminatively. Skipper Ben watched—

"Curious things, them birds,—I mind once when I was messboy on the old *Susannah*, runnin' from Bangor to Charleston with lumber, we got in a thunderin' big blow off'n Cape Hatteras. Carried away our foresail an' fo'topm'st, all the heads'ls an' two of th' three boats. There'd been one of them birds a-follerin' us several days—like this one's a-doin', an'—well, after it lightened up, the Old Man—who was dead set on th' bird—used to feed it, etcetery—missed it one day. Nothin' must do but we heaves to, to 'wait for it,' as he says. Well, there was pretty nigh a moo'tiny aboard! There we was—tight enough, yes—but our top hamper all gone to blazes, an' the crazy old tub would 'broach' now an' again fit to raise th' hair off'n your scalp. 'That bird,' th' old Man says solemn-like, 'is a life preserver that's



what it is. Ef it hadn't stuck to us we'd all a-gone to th' great Beyond; we *must* wait for it!' Well; that speech o' his'n fixed it! We all *knew* he was loony—him an' his great Beyond! What we wanted was to get somewhere out'n th' wind an' sea, so's we could straighten things up a mite. Howsomever, we wallered an' rolled an' groaned an' squeaked, an' what was left o' th' deck load fetched loose an' started in havin' a dance on its own account. Meanwhiles th' old man was squattin' in th' main riggin' with his glasses a-watchin' fur that danged bird, an' 'bout seven bells middle watch it come on to blow heavy again an' we was preparin' to kick good an' hard, when he sings out that he seen it to starboard a-divin' an' a-jumpin' up an' a-divin' agin! He takes th' wheel hisself an' works the *Susannah* towards it, whistlin' fur dear life the whul time!" Skipper Ben laughed reminiscently. "Yes, sir—whistlin' away, an' it a-blowin' great guns an' the old barky gruntin' like a hog under a fence, an' her ribs creakin' like a derrick-boom on a heavy load. Th' seas was a-comin' on board pretty lively when we hauls up clos' to th' bird that was flutterin' an' screechin' like all possessed. We didn't give a hang whut was the matter with it until suddent th' Old Man sings out, his voice a-tremblin'—"Stan' by to pick up that boat!"

"'What boat?' says th' mate, 'yer plumb gone daffy!—No, by snakes, I see it too!' With that we all discovered a small boat a-jiggin' an' a-lurchin' on th' seas. Well—we got hold of it under our lee an' fetched it on deck." Thomson stopped, his eyes roving far away.

"Anythin' in her?" the man at the wheel asked eagerly.

"Yes." The Skipper stopped again.

"What wuz it?" Nick snapped.

"Two men," the other answered;—"both on 'em was near dead o' cold; but the gull had saved 'em. Yes—they birds is curious things," he finished slowly, knocked his pipe out and went below.

All hands were at breakfast. The gull circled high in the air now, round and round the *Star*.

## II

Not a breath of air moved as the sun fell, a misty red, beneath the waters. Its crimson light tinged the *Star* curiously and the shadows of her spars lengthened and shortened on the heaving swell as she rolled. Evening crept rapidly out of the east, and the after-glow of sunset was short on the dreary expanse.

"Smells like wind, Cap'n?" the mate suggested as he picked his teeth with his knife. The click of the metal was sharp in the still air.

Thomson stepped to the binnacle, then gazed steadily into the nor'ard.

"I don't like the look o' it; glass's been a-fallin' rapid all day, an' this swell's growin' or I miss my guess. Ye'd better call all han's, git in yer jib an' clew up yer tops'ls;—might as well take in yer fores'l too while yer about it, we don't want to move far

for to-morrer nohow—there's that bird again! He's been gone all day."

While the men made everything snug for the night, Skipper Ben watched the gull pirouetting above his head idly. It dipped and swung, skimming the water, sometimes uttering its mournful cry.

The night became breathless, and the evanescent sheen of the Northern lights blazing in the dark blue vaults shed a dim strange glow on deck. They lifted and dropped like streaming gauze, scintillating, then seeming to merge into a solid mass of phosphorescence.

"Bright, beant they?"

The Skipper nodded,—“an' it's a-going to blow afore midnight sure as—look yonder,” he said.

Under the brightest part of the lights a long black line showed, from which no sound reached them.

“It's a-comin'! Keep her off a point!”

“Aye, sir—off a point!”

With caressing freshness the breeze struck the *Star*; she leaned gracefully from it and gathered way to the crinkling spatter of water under her bows. It strengthened fast and the schooner bowled along even under shortened sail.

Soon the big swell had little waves running over it; these in turn were crested with white. The mate was giving a hand at the wheel, when out of the darkness came the sharp cry of the gull. He started nervously—“Dang that bird,” he grumbled, for the Skipper's tale had been in his mind all day. Throughout his watch, no matter how often they came about, not getting too far from their grounds, from time to time he heard the gull but never saw

it, then the cry ceased. The half gale did not freshen, but a lumpy, nasty sea was running, and spray flew viciously across the *Star* as she forged ahead.

The mate was for'ard warning the look-out for ice, when something inshore caught his eye. It had disappeared, and the place was black and void where he had seen it.

"Did ye see——" he began, when from the same spot a thin red streak shot into the air, an instant's darkness, then the radiance of a bursting rocket. He ran aft——

"Skipper below, ahoy there!"

"On deck?" the latter grumbled sleepily.

Somebody's sendin' up rockets fast inshore, sir!"—keeping his eyes on the spot—"the fourth's just gone!"

He heard Thomson fighting his way into his sea-boots and oil-skins. Fastening the throat-strap as he tumbled up, the Skipper stood beside him.

"Nasty night to run foul of N'fland rocks, by God!" he roared above the screeching of the wind. "Where—A-ah!" as another rocket's light showed clear in the blackness.

"Come below!" he shouted. The two dropped down. Thomson seized the swinging lantern and peered at the chart, following the coast-line with his stubby finger.

"Whoever it is must be on that Hell's own kitchen—th' *outside* of Forbidden Shoal! Who do you suppose——" then he stopped. They stared at one another with the same fear.

"Nobody else 'ld have rockets, sir," the mate said in a strangely quiet voice.

"Yes, but—but my Lord above, the mail boat'll have over a hundred souls aboard at this time o' th' year!"

The mate nodded, fingering the clasps on his oil jacket.

Thomson stared at the chart again.

"And—and see, here, this blow is due nor'-east, ain't it?"—hurrying on—"D-dassent try to get to leeward o' her from th' nor'ard end o' th' run behind th' reef, 'cause ef we——" He paused, seeing the expression on the mate's face—"What's the matter?"

"D'ye think it—it safe, Cap'n? It's a terrible hole in there with th' leastest sea on." The man flushed then at the look on Thomson's face.

"You call yourself a sailor an' a Gloucesterman, an' *ask me a question like that?*" he bellowed so that the man at the wheel started. "By God, since ye know it so well, ye know that not a man jack'll get ashore alive from that steamer unless we stan's by—an' I don't know ef we *can* do anythin' once we gets there, but you take it from me, my mate, that th' *Star's* a-goin' *inside* o' th' mail boat s'posin' th' Devil rides astride o' her bowsprit! Now git for'ard, send up a rocket an' run one o' th' long flares to th' foret'p'mst head by the signal halliards; be lively 'bout it, an' don't let me hear ye gassin' 'bout whether it's 'safe' or no. How'd ye like to be on her with Old Man Death itchin' fur ye, *eh?*" he roared.

The mate fled up the companion. Thomson impressed the chart on his memory, then fol-

lowed. The men were all on deck silently staring off into the unseen, where they knew that many souls were face to face with the certainty of death by the angry hissing breakers. They knew, too, their own danger in trying to get in behind the outer shoal to the small area of deep and partially protected water through a channel that under the best of conditions was difficult.

"Men," trumpeted Thomson through his hands—"that's the mail boat yonder, an' ye know she carries a big crowd—many fishermen's wives too. I ain't *askin'* ye, 'cause I know most o' ye well, an' ye're Gloucestermen on top o' that, but I'm *tellin'* ye that I'm a-goin' to save what I can o' them, an' ye are a-goin' to help me. Now pray for a moon or a shootin' star or any danged thing ye please that'll show us when we're headin' right for th' southern end o' the channel! Up with that flare!"

Burning a bright blue the brilliant flame illuminated the circles of faces, causing them to be as graven in stone. The rigging stood out boldly and the crests of the seas were pure white. Not a man spoke, but they watched the light jerkily going aloft, realising what a hope it would bring to those yonder in the howling darkness.

The rockets came less frequently now, the mail boat saving them to guide their unknown friends.

"Now, then, shake out yer jib, double reef yer foresail an' set it—she'll handle better. Two hands below, clear away yer ground tackle, an' fur God's sake see that it'll run free; one hand extra to th' wheel; light a yellow flare so's we kin see what we're

a-doin'; lively men, *lively*! Every min'te counts now!"

Stirred by his energy and fearlessness, the men, distorted and grotesque in the glare of the ceston light, scurried about the slanting decks. Thomson dashed below and took another look at the chart; he started for the deck, hesitated, then went into his little cabin. From beneath the tiny mirror he took his wife's photograph, and held the lantern close to it.

"God knows, Mary," he said, speaking to it—"if I'll get out o' this, but I know ye'd wish for me to try, *anyhow*, rememberin' how our boy was saved." He put it back and, coughing hoarsely, went up into the wild night.

"D'ye see her lights yet?"

"No, sir, but she let go a rocket just now. She bears nor' by west from us."

"Ready there for'ard?"

Faintly came the answer. "Ready!"

"*Hard lee!*" He helped climb the spokes of the wheel.

The *Star* came about with a roar of canvas and a mighty lashing of tackle, then filled away, burying her scuppers.

The flare was dying out when Thomson heard a shrill cry and saw the gull winging its way easily alongside. The bird sped on till it reached the bows, then dropped back off the counter; this it did several times. Like a flash his own experience of years before came into Skipper Ben's mind, and he made a quick resolution.

"For'ard there? Don't light another flare, we

need our eyes. Sing out when ye see her lights or hear th' breakers!"

The darkness was intense and the scream of the wind seemed to deaden the lash of the sea.

Another rocket!

And the cry of the gull overhead.

Darkness and straining senses.

Another rocket! Nearer!

And the cry of the gull slightly to port.

"Breakers off th' starboard bow an' th' steamer's port light clos't to th' water beyond!" came faintly but clearly down wind.

"Starboard a trifle!" thundered the Skipper.

He was not watching, but *listening*.

"My God, show me *quick*, we're headin' 'bout right!" He shouted these words unconsciously.

Another rocket!

And the vigorous cries of the gull quite to port.

"Starboard! Still more!"

A long cry close aboard!

"Steady as ye go!"

With nerves and muscles tautened to breaking strain, Thomson listened for his life.

"Breakers — B-R-E-A-K-E-R-S — *close* to starboard!" reached him.

The wail of the gull alongside answered.

"As ye go!" Thomson clenched his hands, and the nails entered his palms.

Racing, tearing over the surges like a mad thing, the *Star* drove on, shivering from stem to stern. He could see both lights of the stricken ship, one far above the other.

"On her beam ends!" he groaned.

The cry of the gull came from the *other* side, loud down wind.

"Port! Hard a' *port*!" he bellowed instantly.

"Breakers on the port bow! Breakers *ahead*!"

He heard the scream but dimly as he put his giant strength to the wheel.

A sickening lunge, a terrific climb, a sea that knocked him flat against the low rail, then a strange quiet.

The *Star* was *inside*, and the mail boat among the seas that broke wildly some two hundred yards away on the Outer Forbidden Shoal.

"Leg-go yer anchors!" He staggered to his feet, and dizzily got forward. "In sail!"

They came down with a run, and the schooner lay, resting easily, riding gently on the broken remnants of the awful surge.

"Show a flare! My God, men, hear that!"

Above the din of foam and water, the dull crashes of wood splintering and grinding came to them.

"*Watch for a line floatin' to us!*"

By the glare of several lights they searched the waters hungrily for the sight of a cask or anything to which a line might be attached.

"Hell, why there's 'Mike'!" shouted the cook excitedly, pointing to the gull that circled close to the water at the edge of the light circle.

"*Where?*" Thomson leaped on the rail. "Aye, an' there's a barrel under him, it'll float past us! Out dory!"

They caught the floating thing and found a light line attached to it, also a tin can wrapped in oilskin. The skipper tore it open.

"Breaking up fast almost in two now 96 on board no one lost yet heave in on this line make heavy one that follows fast mainmast watch for another cask with 2 light lines splice both ends reeve through block show signal when ready.

"MARTIN,

"Captain."

While they hauled in the first line, two men in the dory patrolled the comparatively calm water for the second cask, the gull shrieking about them. They found it, took it on board, spliced the lines, and in ten minutes two women stepped out of a life-buoy to which they were strapped, to the *Star*.

Aching, exhausted, with bleeding hands, the men tugged and hauled.

"There—there's only—only the skipper left now!" the chief engineer gasped as he landed half-drowned on deck.

"Quick!" Thomson reached out to haul.

"She's gone, sir," the mate groaned.

The dim shape of the mail boat had vanished, and the heavy cable lay flat on the water.

No one spoke, and the cries of the gull were silenced.

"Out two more dories! He *may* get through, and the gull——" Thomson checked himself.

Flare after flare was burned; nothing could be seen but wreckage that rocked heavily within the sheltered place.

Skipper Ben listened intently.

Then from far astern, just where the huge seas began to rise again, he heard the bird's mourn-

ful cry, and pulled hard in its direction, flare in hand.

The bird rose a few feet, then dropped to the water, rose again and dropped, screaming call after call, its pinions magnified by contrast to the blackness beyond.

They lifted him carefully to the *Star's* deck, but Skipper Martin was dead.

When the crowd of frightened, praying, and crying men and women had been stowed away in every conceivable nook and corner, Skipper Ben went on deck and stood by the rail as the last flare on board spluttered to its end.

The wind moaned eerily to the death chant of hurtling seas. He looked about him, searching for something.

The familiar cry, but very faint.

Wings folded, head drooping, the gull sat on deck at the foot of the mainmast.

Tenderly he took the bird in his hands and smoothed the graceful feathers.

"You must be part of God," he whispered hoarsely, "I followed you in. Rest to-night and to-morrow go on His work agin! Nobody knows but me an' you, an' I believe."

## "PATIENCE"

### I

"PEARS to me, sir, that the wind ain't never goin' to hold up!" the mate grumbled, kicking the edge of a dory that lay on the *Flying Star's* deck, spitefully.

The schooner lay snug inside the natural break-water of Come Alongside Harbour, Labrador, while the outside seas pounded, lashing themselves to a foam on the jagged masses of rock that shone brilliantly as each huge roller wasted its strength over them.

A blue sky, that was plotched with heavy wind-fleece, through which a summer sun shone with dazzling effect, stretched away to the four points of the world, the fleece touching lightly the dimly visible uplands of moss barren and grey tundra.

As if sprung from the rock, a few scattered tilts<sup>1</sup> were perched here and there at the water's edge. Their sides were of odd driftwood, their roofs of thatched moss and small flat pebbles. Everything on shore was grey, even to the mangy dogs that skulked in and out, belly deep, in the water under the

<sup>1</sup> Labrador fishermen's summer homes.

fish-houses, where they sought heads and entrails of the eternal cod.

Cold and dismally forlorn was the tiny settlement. Its fish-gutted, slippery landing-place offered no inducement to put foot ashore.

The feeble spurts of smoke that whirled away from the rough stone chimneys spoke little of comfort or warmth.

Skipper Ben Thomson looked thoughtfully over the long low point where the spray and salt fume rose in scintillating clouds in the sunlight, to the thunderous roar and lash of the turmoil beyond.

He sighed.

"Don't seem 's ef it would; five days we've had o' it now, eh?"

"Feels like a month to me in this—this—stink-hole!" The mate bit off a chew from his plug viciously—

"Damn!" he said, and the sound mingled with the splash as he spat.

"Why God ever made such a——"

"Belay there, man! Ain't you never heard how th' Labrador was built?"

"Naw!" the other said ungraciously.

"Why, they *do* say as how the Lord made the world in five days. On the sixth He made Labrador, and He was so mad with Himself that He 'spent Sunday throwin' stones at it. That's why it's so blamed rocky!"

But the mate refused to be amused. He was essentially a high sea fisherman, and he loathed the proximity of shore when there was work to do.

"Listen to that!" he growled, as the wind, hauling a bit more to the nor'ard, brought the pandemonium of sound closer to them. "That's it, go it dang ye, lash an' spit an' kick up a hell of a fuss! I hope ye *never* stop—an' us with nigh a full load too."

The skipper looked at him through a puff o' tobacco smoke. He leaned back, caught one knee between his bronzed hands and rocked gently.

"Say, ain't you never learned the meanin' of patience, mate?"

"*Naw!*" the other answered with disgust.

"That puts me in mind o' th' time when I'd just been made mate o' th' *Alice J.* We useter run from Bath, Maine, ter Turks Island, West Indy, with shingles, an' back in salt. Dear sakes, what a pusilamous old ticket she was too! Steer her? Why, Lord alive, she'd gaw all over th' whul ocean ef ye didn't dance a jig, when it was your trick at th' wheel. Her keel was on the bias, her rudder-post stuck out like a sign-board, her fore foot looked like a question mark, an' ef 'twas blowin' any kind o' *decent* breeze you felt like 's if the jibboom was a-goin' ter stare ye in th' face! Oh she was a dandy, no mistake!" Skipper Ben lighted his pipe again.

"But we was a-talkin' o' patience!" he continued.

"You was," muttered the other.

"Well, th' old man's name was Patient Snodgrass—ain't *that* a handle for ye?"

The mate chuckled.

"He had a yarn that he was called Patient 'cause just before he was born his ma was patient—anyhow, that's how he'd tell it. Well, he had one of them

yallery—reddery—bluery parrots aboard, an' *its* name was Patient. He'd yawp to that thing till I nigh went crazy, an' nights in port when 'twas warm an' fine he'd shut every cussed skylight, close the companion, then light a big pipe—so's the bird'll be warm he says, an' the air 'ld git so's you could pass a chunk to th' man at th' wheel, an' all th' time the poor thing 'ld holler 'I'm Patient,' like blazes. 'So am I!' he'd say, but I felt like yellin' '*I'm* not!' 'Twouldn't do fer me just made mate tho', so I useter try ter filter th' air by breathin' through my sheet. It worked fine for filterin', but Lord, it was hot!

"Then he'd get putty well three sheets in th' wind with rum, an' he'd start in 'bout midnight when he'd come aboard, to teach th' parrot to sing 'Love me, an' th' world is mine.' Save us, but I can hear him now!" Skipper Ben's big shoulders heaved. "'Love me,' says he—'I'm Patient,' says th' bird—'an' th' world is *mine*,' says he—'I'm Patient,' sings out th' bird agin. 'Well, I ain't!' he'd roar, an' fetch a thump on th' cage—'Now then, are ye ready? Love me, an'——,' 'I'm Patient,' says the bird, quiet-like. 'Damned ef *I* am!' he'd screech, hit the cage a devil's own lick, fall into his bunk, an' be snorin' quick. The parrot 'ld pick hisself up in th' corner an' say, 'I'm Patient,' kinder mournful like, then I useter sneak out an' pick up th' cage an' set it straight so's th' poor thing could go to roost. It would pinch my finger gently an' go *lu-lu-lu-lu*, very soft.

"Fust thing in th' mornin' it would holler so's you could hear it a mile to wind'ard—'Avast, ye lubbers!—ye fall to an' scrape yer top'm'sts. I'm Patient'—

Swear?—Saints above, I never hearn such langwidge in all my seafarin' days?

"Well, we was ready for sea, over th' Plimsol mark with salt,—but th' old man says, 'Hell, it'll melt out of her,'—an' waiting fur the tide in Turks Island Harbour. Blowin' heavy outside, an' lookin' greasy in the nor'-east. He was half full as usool when he come from th' agents an' sings out t' up anchor. We was short handed, but up she came an' we stood out. It caught us fair on th' beam, an' th' way th' old *Alice J.* rolled was a caution. Three or four times I thought she'd *never* get back on her keel. But th' Old Man gits astride of the wheel-box an' begins to sing. A'tween puffs I could hear th' bird screechin' down below—'What the —— do I pay ye for? Git sail on her! I'm Patient!'"—The Skipper lighted his pipe again—'So we hung on till all of a suddent a cross sea strikes her, rips th' coamin' off'n the for'ard hatch an' th' next pours below. I seen 'twas time to do somethin' if we didn't want to shake hands with Davy Jones, so I grabs the Old Man an' fires him down th' companion, an' comes about fer harbour agin. Th' old shippy got lower an' lower till her decks was awash, but we was nigh onto th' beach then, an' I knowed th' seas would heave us to it alright. So I hauls Patient Snodgrass on deck, makes two life preservers fast to him, an' heaves him over just as we struck. All hands jumped when th' for'mast come down—*bang*—an' when I thought as how I'd better git along too, th' last thing I heard was th' parrot singin' out 'I'm Patient.'"

The skipper stopped, puffing slowly,—

"We all got ashore, but it needn't have happened if

th' Old Man had lived up to his name. So ye see, my mate, I've had *some* experience with th' use o' patience, an' its consequences."

The mate grunted something, and Skipper Ben went for'ard, still chuckling.

## II

About dinner-time a man and a boy pushed an old dory off the rocks and pulled slowly towards the *Star*.

"They're comin' fishin'—fur dinner, I'll bet," the cook said as he peeled potatoes rapidly.

"Well they won't git it," the mate snapped—"what d'they think this craft is—a floatin' hotel?"

He watched the dory's approach crossly, and barely nodded when the poorly clad, thin figure of the man drew itself over the rail, then leaned down and hauled the boy up. The man's face had the stamp of consumption and the hopeless expression of one accustomed to bitter hard work and hunger; the boy too, in little patched sea-boots and a ragged man's jersey that fell almost to his knees like a skirt, seemed wan and forlorn.

The mate said nothing, and the two felt that they were not welcome.

Having scanned everything alow and aloft, the man scraped one foot apologetically—

"She be vun vine ship, zir!"

"Belike," said the mate—"none o' yer nasty little tinker craft is *this* one!"

The man was silent. He shrank sensitively from the mate's rough voice.

With big sad blue eyes the lad stared about him, then edged closer to his father.

Typical specimens were these of what a bad season does for the men of Labrador. Fish being scarce—driven off the shore by the ice beyond the reach of their little trawls and dories—the men have nothing wherewith to barter with the few trading schooners that ply along the coast all summer. Their flour, tea, and molasses run shorter and shorter; at last they and their wives and children have nothing but cod, and little of that.

"Hullo! Mornin' to ye!" Skipper Ben said cheerily as he came on deck. The man touched his old sou'-wester.

"What is it? a bit o' 'baccy? Lay hold, then!" he tossed a plug that he had just taken from his own supply to the gaunt Labradorian.

"Thank un kindly, zir." He bit off a big piece and a look of relief crossed the haggard, unshaven features.

"Set down; how's fish inshore?"

"Ba-ad th' year, zir, mortal ba-ad."

"Hm!" The Skipper watched the other as he squatted awkwardly on a pile of rope, his eyes dully wandering towards the open sea.

"Your kid?"

"Aye, zir."

"Any more?"

"Zeven, zir," very low.

"Eight kids in this terrible land o' nothing." Skipper Ben muttered — "How d'ye keep 'em alive?"

The Labradorian looked up—

"Fish an' salt meaty an' 'tato—when I kin get fish to trade."

"What, to *little* kids?"

"Aye, zir, ye can't *buy* milk, an' a woman can't give it, zir, not on this coast."

"Are ye all well?"

"No, zir,"—the man stuttered confusedly—"the woman she's kind o' ba-ad, zir, an'——"

"Starvation's 'bout the size o' it, eh? Oh, I know you fellers. Ye're too damned proud to say it, eh? Come now—eh?"

The other did not answer, and the little chap's big eyes gazed wonderingly at the skipper.

"Where's yer tilt?"

"Yon vun,"—ducking his head towards a tumble-down building that was perched on the cliffs.

"Well, come on, I'm a-goin' ashore t'see for meself."

"Ye'd best not, Cap'n," said the mate, who had come up behind him—"There's all kinds o' sickness in these holes, an'——"

"Who's askin' yer advice? Say, yer a good mate an' all that, but this is my own cruise, understand me?"

"Aye, Cap'n."

"Don't furgit it, then!" Ben growled.

He swung himself in the ticklish dory and they pulled for shore.

"Fish in this?" The skipper noted the crazy weak ribs, the patched sides, the water-logged, soggy bottom.

"She's all I've got, zir, an' zafe eno'," the Labradorian added quickly.

"I wouldn't go out o' harbour in her, not *me*!"

In silence they reached the shore and stepped out on shelving rock that had been worn smooth by the sea's work of ages. Little crabs scuttled into crevasses, their sharp claws scratching audibly, and from in the tilt came the fretful cry of hungry children. Here Skipper Ben strongly got the reek of rotting cod livers that filled puncheons in rows behind tilts further along the shore. He spat vigorously and blew his nose.

Dirty children of all ages rose clamorously as he climbed the short ladder that led into the one-roomed house.

In a corner, a ragged quilt over her, lay the woman, and her figure—merely skin and bone—showed plainly. Her cheeks were bright crimson, her eyes sparkling, and her breath came in short hard gasps that sent a shudder through Skipper Ben. A child of a few months clutched at her thin hair, another jerked at the faded and tattered calico thing she wore, but she was too weak to resist.

"My God, man, she'll die! Here, clear out the whul o' ye!"

Using his cap, he drove the horde pell-mell down the ladder, the man looking on stupidly.

"Give her som'thin', can't ye?"

The Labradorian brought an old tin that had a greasy mess in the bottom. The skipper smelt it, then with an oath flung it out. It jangled on the rocks harshly.

"That wass all all th' soup I had, zir," he said aghast.

"Ain't there nothin' else?"

"A bitty dried fish, but——"

Skipper Ben thrust him aside—"Star ahoy!" his powerful voice rang over the harbour.

"On shore?" came faintly.

"Send a d-o-r-y *lively!*"

"Aye—e."

He paid no attention to the native, but took off his coat and placed it under the woman's head. She looked up at him, a world of pain in her brown eyes, but she could not speak.

"Wish to th' Lord Mary was here," he said aloud—"I never *was* no good at doctorin', but she'll die ef I don't look alive."

He saw it all. The pitiful want, the slow misery of starvation, the wretched fishing-gear, spliced and broken then spliced again—and tears came to his eyes.

"I never knowed there was such turr'ble things in th' world. Look sharp, Alec"—to one of his men that came up the ladder—"tell cook to give ye condensed milk, tea an' coffee, *all* th' bread he's got made, a peck o' potatoes, a hunk of that fresh beef that's on th' ice we got from th' berg, an' here"—he gave him a key—"look in th' after locker on th' port side an' bring me a bottle o' brandy an' th' little box of med'cine. Hustle now!"

"Aye-aye, Cap'n."

Dazedly the Labradorian listened. His numbed brain could not understand at first, then it slowly came to him. He broke down, and cried:

"We—uns 've heerd tell o' th' 'Merican fishermen an' what theys done fur th' likes of we, but oh, Capen, zir, t' God'll bless un for this day." He searched

for words—"I isn't got much, but ye can have we's gear an' —an'—th' dory.—She's good eno' fur 'nother season, zir," he said-eagerly.

"Who wants yer dory or yer rotten old gear?—Ef ye *will* go to work an' bring eight kids inter a land where there ain't food enough fur one I can't help it, but ye can bet yer last fish that th' Almighty didn't mean fur ye to starve like this, or He wouldn't ha' made it blow so's I had to run inter yer stinkin' little harbour."

Skipper Ben spoke roughly to hide his emotion. The man drew back.

"Come, come, lad; I ain't great cahoots on r'ligion, but I've seen God's mercy, to *me* onct, an' I ain't furgot it, neither!"

He paced up and down, watching for the dory.

"Guess I'll go 'long too," said the mate as the dory was about to leave the *Star*—"Wind's droppin' fast; mabbe we can get out afore sundown."

The skipper met him at the door.

"Wind's a-fallin' sir,—fast; we could get to Domino Run by daylight an'——"

"Where's that grub?" Ben roared.

With almost a woman's tenderness the big Gloucesterman heated a mixture of condensed milk and water to which he added brandy. The figure on the hard bed drank eagerly, then lay back. Her whisperings ceased, the bright eyes closed.

Skipper Ben took what he called "a squint at th' situation."

"She'll do, but she needs tendin'," he said to himself, "it's plain starvation now; she'd got consumption afore to-day."

With his own hands he cooked a beef and potato stew and thickened it with flour. Of the bread he cut huge chunks and parcelled it out among the children, who, had he allowed them, would have fought for the food.

"An' ye hear talk o' what human nature is under th' spar varnish o' civilisation!"

Gradually the wind died away, and the ponderous boom of the sea filled the interior with a rush of sound.

"We can get out now, sir, an' make Domino Run. This wind'll blow up from th' sou'-east, an' we——"

"'I'm Patient!'" quoted the big man, and the mate said no more.

### III

The next day was beautiful, a middling sou'-east wind cresting the rollers lightly. And the next was the same. Still Skipper Ben hung on in Come Alongside Harbour, watching over the woman in the tilt, feeding the children, and grumbling at the man.

She was able to move weakly on the bed. "Capen," she said, with some strength in her voice, "Fur why d'ee giv' up these good da-ays at t' fish fur we?"

He whittled tobacco for his pipe—"Me? Oh, 'I'm Patient y'see.' Wanted to kind o' get ye headed right. I don't mind waitin'," he said cheerily.

She watched his every movement.

"Don't ee blame th' man, Capen, will ee? Bain't his'n fault."

He almost said something harsh, but stopped himself.

Everything was still that night when he turned in on the *Star*.

A heavy lurch woke him. The schooner was pitching badly, straining at her anchors. He jerked himself into his oilskins and went on deck just as the mate was coming below.

"Come up a livin' gale, sir, in no time. Blowin' east-sou'-east hardest I ever seen. All th' chain's out she's got, but——"

The Skipper looked round in the intense darkness; every bit of rigging whined and moaned, twanging a chorus of discontent to the rumble and *throoom* of furious seas.

"Get yer kedge out t'starboard lively, then sit tight an' hope it won't drag!" Ben said gruffly, and watched the men as they did it. It held.

With the rising of the sun, the gale fell and the skies were one mass of torn clouds, whose edges and sides the sun painted deep grey and gold, dark crimson and yellow.

"Who's that?"

Lurching heavily, foremast gone, a rag of canvas clinging to the main, a small schooner staggered into Come Alongside Harbour at noon from the terrific outside.

"Both anchors gone, an' all my dories, can I make fast to ye?" came a thin voice from the battered craft.

"An' welcome," Skipper Ben howled above the wind.

The stranger came aboard the *Star* in a few moments. He was dripping, and his eyes had a wild, hunted look.

"Oh, my God! My God!" he groaned.

The men clustered round him.

"Git for'ard!—Mate, a hand to take him below."

"All gone! All gone!"

"Who's all gone? What ails ye?" Skipper Ben dosed him with more whisky.

"Was—lyin'—last—night—Domino, fifty or sixty craft,—an'—it—struck—'thout—a—sound. Ye—ye know—how—'tis in th' Run, don't ye?" convulsively to the Skipper—"narrer an'—an' mean's *Hell*—to—git—out—of in a blow?"

Skipper Ben nodded.

"Not—a—anchor—held—not *one*!" he whispered.

Skipper Ben Thomson and his mate looked at each other.

"Every—one—but—me—went on—on th' rocks. I—can—hear 'em yellin' yet. I—was—up—at th' north'n—end,—my—chains—parted an'—an' *some—how*—we—got—clear. Outside—a sea—struck—us an' took—eight—o' my—my—'leven—men. All—to—onct," he said, trembling from head to foot. "All—to—onct, an' all my—dor—ies. Fur God's sake put—me—ashore, I'll never—go to—sea agin. Eight men all—to—onct, all—to—onct, an' them tryin' to—git—sail—on—her; Oh, my God!"

Nerves shattered by the awful ordeal he had been through, the man broke into wild sobs.

Skipper Ben and his mate quieted him at last, and he fell into the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Not a sound in the cabin of the *Star* save for the drone and beat of the ocean.

"We'd 'have looked pretty in Domino Run last night, wouldn't we—mate?"

The other did not answer.

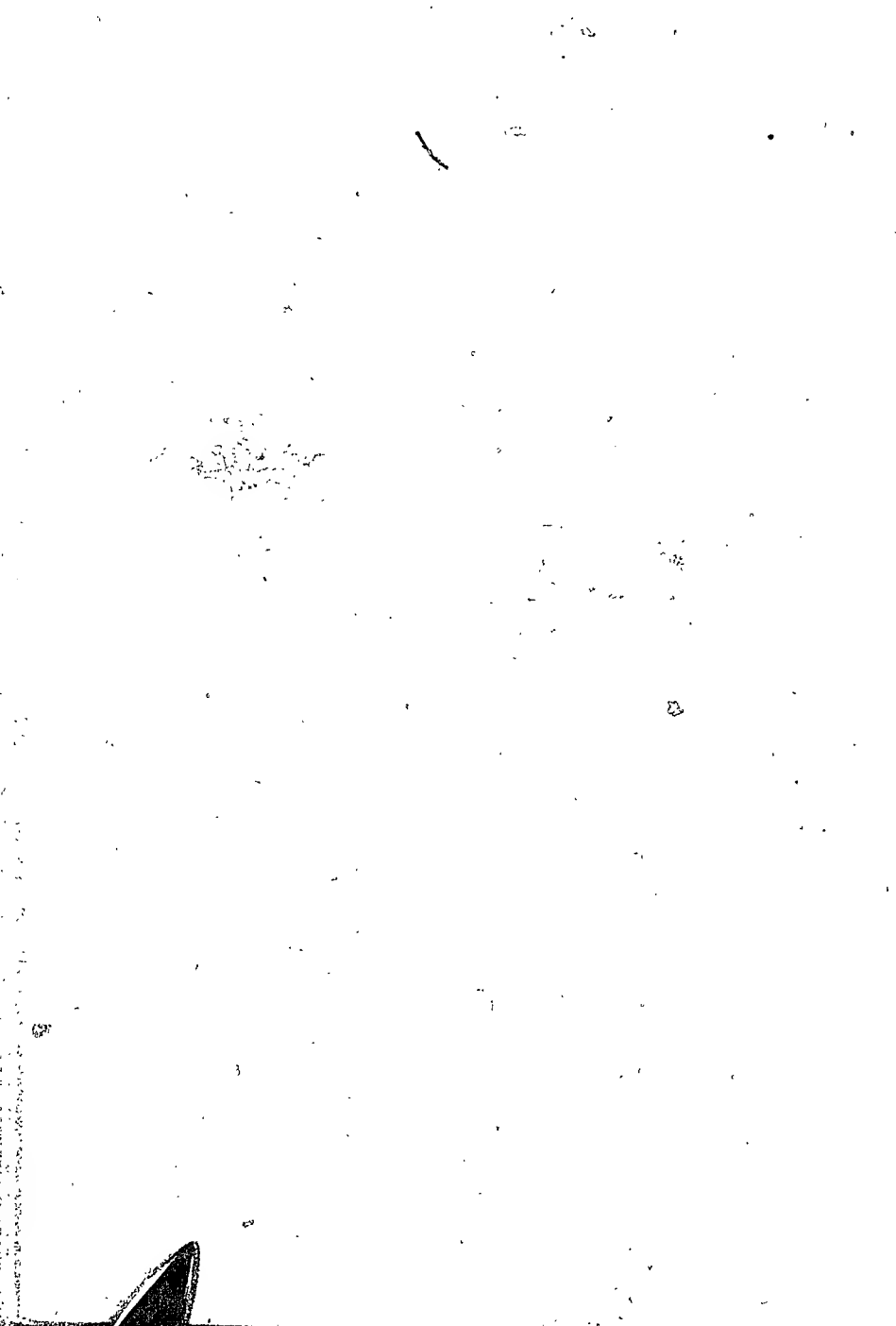
The muscles of the Skipper's jaws worked beneath the tanned skin.

"An' ef it hadn't 'a been for that woman an' kids ashore, we'd been there,—mate!"

Still the other did not answer.

"Ye see"—said the Skipper slowly—"it pays to have patience."

And the other nodded.



## SALLIE

### I

TOM NOSEWORTHY clasped and unclasped his great rough hands convulsively. Much sadness had come to him.

"Aye, Sallie, what's us goin' to do de winter?"

A long sigh followed the words, and the gaunt man's eyes wandered far out on the sea that beat against the coast of Labrador. Cold waters, cold skies, and clumps of ice met his gaze,—dim in the fading afternoon light.

Everywhere the monotonous greys of October in the north. A belated fishing schooner, hurrying for Newfoundland, and in the distance the smoke of the *Strathcona*, were the only moving objects on the vast screen of immobility.

The woman moved close to him and pushed the tangled masses of grey hair from his forehead. "'T'll all come right, Tom, lad, us'll live somehow, even ef de fish was bad de year."

He leaped up. "It's easy to say it, Sal, but where's de money? An' nex' year — Oh, my God."

She soothed him quietly, as his head sank into his

hands. Their little home stood on a craggy ledge, jutting out over the sullen water; beneath it, a slender, puny dock stretched its length on trembling piles. A dory, two old trap-boats, and beyond a skiff were moored. Where the dock touched the rocks a nearly fallen cod-house loomed forlorn, the oil barrels behind it half empty and green with decay.

The whole scene typified a "bad year" with the cod, a "bad year" with Baine, Johnson, the traders and fish buyers, and starvation, possibly for the winter. The great mournfulness of it all was intensified by the lonely scream of the gulls that floated, eddied over the cabin, their pinions beating, beating silently.

They had no children—these two, and Sallie stayed at home, while Tom was "after de fish." She was a cheerful woman, with that simplicity and roughness that characterises the Labradorians. Poor, yes; dulled and worn with hard, bitter labour, but God-fearing and kind.

"Don-no take on so, Tom, I be zure some'at 'll be coomen fer us, lad." She kissed him.

The long, thin face peered through the fingers at the board floor. "Ye've been al'ays a savin' to me, girl, and God knows, I hope you be right."

He got to his feet again wearily. "Da's four quintal of fish fer salt yet; I be goin' to see after un." He went down slowly, his iron-heeled boots clinking on the ledges.

When he was beyond hearing, the woman sank on her knees by the tumbled bed and prayed, crying softly. "He do fish hard, God, an' tries so bad to do right. An' us's got no money, no flour, no 'taties for

de winter. "O God, please help us." She dried her eyes on the frayed hem of her skirt, and built the fire in the cracked and propped-up stove for supper mechanically.

For years she had known nothing but slender means of sustenance. Her clothes were of her own making; awry, but clean. Her face was seamed and worried far beyond her years, and her body bent with handling heavy loads of fish.

It had never been so bad as this before; they had always managed to eke out their money and food from one summer to the next, but now——?

"Da's quarter barrel flour, de fish, an' gallon molasses, an' da's all, 'cept de tea," she whispered to herself.

The man came back then and almost crawled to a seat behind the table near the heat. She looked at him quickly.

"You be'ant sick, Tom?"

"I don't know," he muttered; then, "I be cold, Sal, wicked cold." He shivered in his thin overalls and shirt. "I could no do de fish, Sal. I guess I be tired, ti-red," and his head fell forward on the rough boards.

The wind whispered about the shack, penetrating its time-worn cracks and corners with chill rustling sound. Darkness and its foreboding crept out of the sea, shutting off the ice and the waters. One star gleamed above the cabin, fitfully at best, but between veils of scudding wind drift it shone strangely bright.

"Tom, lad, supper." She took his hand. For an instant it seemed lifeless, then it closed on

hers and he stared at the heavy flour cakes before him.

"Yes, Sal, supper."

He ate, lifting the food to his mouth with vacant motion, the weary blue eyes fixed on space meanwhile. She watched him anxiously, a new fear growing on her as the minutes fled by to the dull tic-toc toc-tic of the wooden clock in the corner. When he had finished he swallowed the black tea, feverishly gulping the hot liquid, and leaned against the wall, feeling for his pipe. "De last piece!" and a slow smile passed over his face as he cut tiny bits of tobacco from the plug. She tried to smile too, but somehow it wouldn't come; she choked back tears instead.

"Sal," he said, when the pipe was going, "how much money have us?"

She pulled a pitifully thin black pocket-book from the table drawer and emptied its contents before him. A five dollar bill, two twenty-five cent pieces, and seven pennies. He counted them all with painful care.

"Be'ant much, be it, Sal, for de winter?"

"No, lad," she swallowed hard, "it be'ant."

Drops that glistened in the candle light gathered in his eyes. "Can ye ever forgive me, g'rl, fer bringin' ye to this?"

Instantly she was on her knees beside him. "I loves ye, Tom, an' ye loves me; that makes up fer it all, lad."

He passed his hands over her brown hair, almost happily. Then the stern facts forced themselves into that happiness. "What to do—what to do?" he groaned.

The smell and reek of the ocean draught filled the cabin with its dampness; he coughed once, harshly, and his shoulders seemed to sag more than before. The woman saw and her lips quivered, but she bravely tried to cheer him. "Ye've got a bitty cold; best get to bed."

He gazed apathetically at the tiny red lines on the stove, where the embers showed through the cracks like threads of molten gold. "W'ere's Andy?" he muttered fretfully. "Bet he's up to Ike's a-drinkin'."

Sallie's face became hard suddenly, as though a freezing wind had come. "Most likely, Tom; but then, he never did us no help anyways. Come, lad, get to bed till I warms a stone fer t' feet."

He allowed himself to be led over, gently pushed down and covered with the musty blanket and quilt. She heated a flat stone and put it at his feet. A long time she watched him, as he tossed and whispered, clenching and opening his hands. Now and then she could hear whole sentences. "Andy, ef ye'd on'y fished along o' me an' give me a hand at t' trap I'd no be this-a-way fer t' winter." A long pause, then—

"Sallie, my poor 'oman, I don'na know what bad I've a-done fer God ter hit me so powerful hard—so pow-er-ful hard." His voice trailed off and he slept.

She got up from beside him and went to the door, searching the darkness for some comfort—some little ray of hope.

Nothing there, nothing anywhere but the sodden gloom and the desolate light wind from off the sea. And as she stood there the light wind strengthened,

first in 'little puffs, then in long breaths, finally causing ripples to gurgles among the ledges below.

The man woke and coughed long and raspingly. He raised his head, hearing the whining sobs of the wind. "Sal!" he called.

"Aye, Tom?"

"T' skiff—on'y one anchor—mus' go out!" He tried to stand but fell back helplessly.

"You lie still, lad, I'll go."

He tried to call her back, then listened to her heavy shoes going rapidly toward the dock. He lifted himself on one elbow, perspiration streaming from his face even in the chillness. Then he fell back with a low groan.

Sallie picked her way to the end of the dock, the boards creaking and swaying unsteadily; she let herself down into one of the boats, cast off the painter, seized the great scull oar and made her way slowly in the darkness, with a beam wind to the skiff. The work was hard in the heavy boat, but she pushed and swung bravely. The wind, increasing every moment, tore her hair loose, and it bothered her, flying about her eyes. She caught the longest wisps and put them in her mouth.

"Tom's sick!" she said aloud; "I dunno what to do if he be sick bad!"

The masts of the little schooner-rigged craft stood out boldly against the black skies that loomed sharp over her.

She steered her awkward craft alongside and jumped on the low deck, painter in hand. Stumbling for'ard, she felt the single anchor chain, and the little tugs and pulls, with slack instants

between, told her that the skiff was dragging fast. Aye, and she could make out the bottom of the bay astern, and dimly see the long rollers breaking against the land. "Jest in time, Tom," she whispered, letting go the other anchor. She paid out chain till it brought up taut on the bitts. "Thar, uh'll hold now!"

She made for shore, and reached it, arm weary, but satisfied in that she had "helped Tom."

When she came to the cabin a rough, loud voice grated into the wind. "Here's a bottle, man, get up an' hev drink!"

As she passed the threshold she heard the faint answer, "I'm — so — ti-red — Sal! — w'ere's Sal? — t' skiff?"

She darted past the burly figure that stood near the bed. "I be here, lad, an' t' skiff is holdin' good! I dropped t' other anchor." She smoothed the hot hands that twitched on the quilt.

"Ah—ah—a!" The long sigh was followed by silence.

She listened to his short, quick breaths anxiously. Seeing that he half slept again, she turned in fierce silence to the other. "An' you, Andy, his own brother, to do this!" Her words came in stinging whispers.

"Do what, w'man?"

She tossed her head back with a wild defiance and her words seared. "Do what, w'man?" she imitated him marvellously. "An' ye want to know?"

The shaggy head nodded.

"What then but drink and waste t' time God's giv' ye to work in; what then but bring him an'

me starin' starvation fer t' winter; what then, on top o' t' all, to wake him when he's asleep an' sick, fer ter drink?" She stopped, the big man gazing at her wide-eyed. "An' ye want more?" she hissed.

"Get away, Sal! get away, ye's crazy. He ain't sick, no more'n I be. I—I"—the massive face broke into wrinkles, and drunken tears followed. "I loves him, Sal, I do; an' if he's sick——"

"He is sick! Cain't you hear?" as Tom coughed and choked.

Andy straightened up with an attempt at dignity. "He's got—got—n' cold! N'thin' ser'ous; hev a drink?"

She grabbed the bottle from him before he knew, and flung it through the window, the pane crinkling in the silence, the smash of a broken bottle outside coming as an echo.

"Hell!" He started toward her, one huge fist raised.

She faced him. "Yes, an' strike!" The look in her eyes frightened him. She advanced now. "You—you—man, t' meanest was ever made—you who has plenty o' money would no lend Tom one cent when he was a-needin' it so powerful bad."

"I did no hev it, Sal."

"You lie, an' ye know ye lie, an' he—ha!" she laughed bitterly—"he believes in ye an' loves still!"

She would have gone on mercilessly, but the man on the bed stirred and a burst of coughing filled the interior with a hard sound. His wife bent over him; then she started back in fear. Everything forgotten

but her love for her husband, she clutched Andy by the arm. "Look—look—it's blood!"

From the thin blue lips tiny freckles of red froth spilled over the chin.

"Andy, ye must go to Fishin' Ship Harb'r! I see t' *Strathcona* goin' by t'-night, mabbe un'll stop there!" The brother stared at her, then he laughed. "Me? Fish'n Ship Harb—! Why 's thick a foag t' outside, an' I be no goin' row ten mile in no foag!" He relapsed, muttering, on a stool.

The woman was crazed with agony. She stood still, the possibilities dulling her brain.

The wind had gone from the sea; instead, a mile off shore, a great grey bank hung ponderous and forbidding, reaching up into the stars that twinkled over the cabiñ. The Northern Lights described an arc of shifting evanescence, their glows brightening, fading, then bursting forth as veils of minute brilliancy. The distant thunderous roar of the breakers on Head Point stole through the stillness with liquid croons. The woman turned toward the hulk of a man, comfortably ensconced against the wall. "Ye'll—no—go?"

He did not note the tones of her voice.

"N-n-o!" he growled. "T'm's no sick, on'y cold, da's all—had many—'m 'self!"

She leaped to him till her worn figure towered over his bulk. "An' by t' God dat I an' Tom believes in; by my trustin' faith, an' by our good lives, Tom's an 'mine, I asks fer a sign t'll make ye sober an' go t' Fishin' Ship Harb'r t' th' *Strathcona*!"

He leered up at her. "Aw ye'r crazy, Sal, t're

be'ant no such t'ings as s—s—si—gns, like ye talks 'bout; t'ere ain't no God 'cept us—me—m'self. I'm m' God, an' God 'nough," he finished in a mutter.

She turned, and fell on her knees beside the bed, praying.

Andy, stalwart, gigantic, on the stool, filled his pipe, spilling most of the tobacco that he cut on the floor. "God! God!" Then he gurgled:—"Ike's m' God 's long 's he's got t' rum!" and relapsed into a drunken silence of stertorous breathings.

Then he stumbled out into the grey night.

## II

The woman seemed not to notice his departure, but when she got to her feet from the bedside, the frenzy of prayer passed, and saw the empty bench, there was a curious far-away look in her eyes. "O God," she whispered, "take care o' Tom an' Andy; they boths of un need bein' took care o' so powerful."

She stirred the fire carefully and put in more wood. Then she sat by it, both thin rough hands on her knees. She had left the draught door open and the reflections of the deep, hot glow shone on her face with wonderful, softening effect. The lines were smoothed away, and the eyes were peaceful, giving out tender thoughts, but so weary and sad.

"Andy will no' go t' Fishin' Ship fer t' doctir, so you'll have to make Tom well, O God." Stillness in the

cabin then, unbroken save for the low *ruffle, ruffle* of waters—mysterious out there in the night.

All at once her head lifted quickly, her eyes became sharp in sympathy with the straining of her ears. From far in the darkness she thought she heard the throbbing of engines, the fog-dulled beat of a propeller. At the door she could hear it plainly—coming—coming. Now beaten off by the faint draughts, the sounds faded. "'Tis t' doctir ship, an' she be'ant a-comin'!" Then the breezes baffled and Sallie heard it again—nearer now. "She be a-comin'! Must be acause t' foag, ter lie in t' bay; O God, t'ank you!" A swift run and she was at her husband's side.

"Sal, I be bad, girl." His eyes were shining brightly, a heavy, angry flush on his cheeks.

"Tom, lad, t' doctir ship be outside—I be a-goin' out ter she. You lie quiet, boy, won't y'? I be back right soon!"

"No, Sal, not alone—I kin feel t' foag! Not alone! Where's Andy?"

"Gone t' skiff." She lied bravely.

"Sal, you get Andy t' go wi' y'?"

"Yes, Tom; thar now, ke'p still an' I'll be right back!" She threw a ragged shawl over her head and started down the cliff path.

Thrup—thrup—thrup. She could distinguish oar strokes plainly. She went to the dock end and waited.

"Easy, men!"

"T' doctir!" she breathed.

A dory slid out of the night at her feet, bumped against the dock, and hands that seemed to have no arms clutched the string pieces.

"Doctir?"

"Halloa, Sallie!" a cheery, strong voice answered. "We had to stop over in the bay to-night on account of the fog, so I came ashore to see how you and Tom are getting on."

Before she knew it the figure stood beside her, a shade in the gloom. "Oh, doctir, Tom's sick so bad, an' I——"

"What; what?" Come along." He seized her by the arm. Together they reached the cabin. The Doctor was beside Tom in an instant. "Get a light, Sallie." Quivering, trembling all over, she brought one. He looked at the blood stains, listened carefully at the man's chest, then turned to the woman with a sigh of relief.

"He's burst a blood-vessel in his throat, Sallie, and has taken a cold, that's all. Has he been ——" He stopped. She had fallen in a heap on the floor.

"Here—Bryant!"

"Yes, Doctor?" Another figure from the boat had come to the cabin more slowly.

"Just row out and bring my case, please."

"Certainly!"

The Doctor pillowed Sallie's head on his coat, then bathed her face in water, gently sprinkling it on her forehead and throat. She recovered slowly, sat up—"Tom? Tom?"

"Quite right, Sallie, he's in no danger at all."

She burst into tears, then—"Oh, Doctir, we's got so hard a fight ter live, no money, no fish,

nothin' fer t' winter, an' Tom, he be'ant strong 'nough t' work all 'lone, he be'ant, Doctir." She rested her head on his kindly, warm hands.

"Why, Sallie, I thought he had a brother that worked with him."

"Aye, Doctir, so's he got un brother, Andy, but he's go get t' rum at Ike's most all t' time, an' he don's help Tom none." She sobbed. He waited for her to become quiet. She went on—"Tom 'ud do anythin' fer Andy, Doctir, evens so much as to gie him our last bitty bread."

The grave, even features of the man of Labrador became hard. "I shall stop Ike's selling rum, and I will talk to Andy," he said, and there was a grim tone to his words.

Sallie looked into his eyes. "I've ast God, Doctir, to help us, w'en I thought as how Tom was a-goin' ter be powerful bad. Andy would-no go t' Fishin' Ship; I see'd t' *Strathcona* goin' by de afternoon, an' I thought as how she'd stop dere de night; but now——" She drew her sleeve over her eyes furtively—"God has ans'ered my bitty prayer an' brought ye to Tom, an' I be mighty obliged, Doctir."

He smoothed her hands quietly. "Sallie?"

"Aye, Doctir?"

"Do you remember when you came to my service that Sunday?"

"Don't I 'member, Doctir? 'Tis ye thet showed me that t'ere was a God a-watchin' us all; but, Doctir, ye said many t'ings dat I could-no onderstan'—no get t' right meanin' of."

He smiled sadly. "And the disciples came,

and said unto Him, Why speakest Thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them: Because it is given unto you to know the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."

He was silent for a moment, the woman yearning for his words. "You say that I came in answer to your prayer; to you it has been given, Sallie; remember and understand."

"But, Doctir, I prayed for some'at else an' it ain't been——"

"Here you are, Doctor." The coming in of Bryant interrupted and silenced the woman.

While certain remedies were administered to the man on the bed, the blackness outside changed suddenly. From the sullen fog and night gloom a lurid glare grew. At first as a faint light, then becoming stronger, it shed angry, blood-like lights on the cabin. These intensified and were as shafts of living heat. Then, bursting from the clogging mist, a great ball of fire rose, a quivering, leaping thing of molten rays, that gave out shaft-like iridescent flames.

"Doctor!"

"Yes, Bryant?"

"Come—see this!"

Together the two men, Sallie behind them, watched. Nearer and nearer, until almost over the cabin, the globe of furious red came. The three cast shadows on the boards.

"Curious electrical phenomenon, that," the Doctor said. "I have never seen one like it on the coast. Beautiful, isn't it?"

"Very!" the other answered.

## III

Andy had left the cabin with vague, drunken anger. All that he could think of doing, was to get aboard of his dory and row to Ike's. He got the oars between the thole-pins somehow, and cast off the painter. "Signs!" he muttered again. Signs be damned!" He pulled ahead.

The blank vastness of fog enveloped him instantly, and the light in the cabin vanished, shut off by the mist. "A drink—a drink I mu-s-st hev!"

His oars creaked mournfully, with squeakings that penetrated the dampness—but a short distance. He saw nothing, heard nothing, but the sounds of his advance, till with a his-s-ing (so it seemed to him), a huge red circle hovered over his head. Darts of flame seemed to envelop him and his dory, approaching—growing, dropping on him—aye, threatening to shrivel him. At first he stared vacantly, then he became frightened. He rowed desperately, but fast as he rowed, hard as he struggled, till sweat rolled down his face, he could not escape this awful blaze in the heavens. "No—no!" he screamed then. "I'll go fer t' Doctir—I will, I will—I'll go to Fishin' Ship, or anywh'res.

Still drunk, the fear of this terrible thing that hung over him grew, till he was crazed—beside himself. Yet it loomed, colossal and frightful, darting beams that made him cringe and grovel on the thwart. "I'll give up drinkin'—won't drink no more—never!"

Strangely, he felt that this promise would pacify the fire that approached so fast. He watched it, crouching in the dory bottom. "Sal's right; she ast fer a sign, an' I give in; 'less I do I goin' to be burned 'live." He waited, peering from under his cap at the fire above him. "I give in!" he shouted then, his voice sounding weirdly. "I give in—God, cain't you hear me?"

Slowly the red ball sank till it vanished to sight in the cold, grey thickness. Andy breathed deep. "I'll go back ter tell Sal thet I'll go ter Fishin' Ship fer t' doctir, an' dat I'll no drink no more, an' help Tom."

He rowed back feverishly. Reaching the wharf he made the dory fast, and ran to the cabin. "Sal, I be sorry—sure—I——" A tall figure intercepted his entrance.

"Andrew, I thought more of you than——"

In an instant he recognised the "Doctir's" voice. His presence astonished him powerfully. "Nodder sign," he muttered, "dat I be wrong." Then—"Doctir, I be sorry, sure, an' I'll help Tom so long 'o I live."

The kind words that followed remained in his mind forever afterward. "Andrew, my man, all that we can hope for in this world is God. Believe in Him and His work, and you will be rewarded."

The great hulk of a man bowed his head silently. Sallie came to him then, pushing her hand into his. "Tom?" he asked hoarsely.

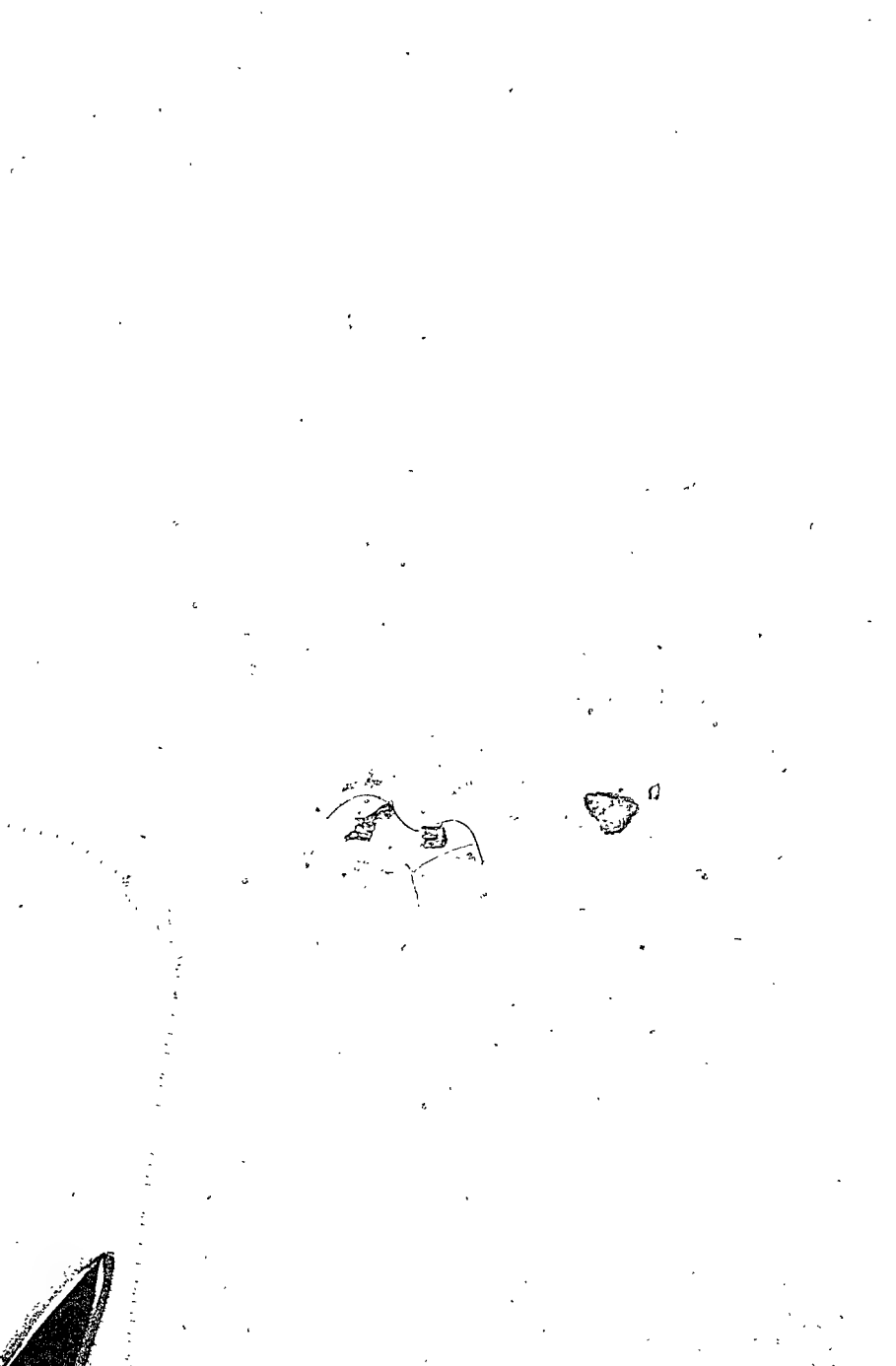
"He be no bad sick, Andy."

"Forgi'e me, Sal; I be mortal sorry."

Together they went to the bed. The sick man looked up, and a glad light came on his face. "Andy, I loves ye much, but Sal—oh, Sal, ye've done it all!"

The Doctor, Bryant, and Andy stood back from the two.

"No, Tom, lad—not me—not Sal; jest God."



## A HALCYON NIGHT

THEY drifted slowly over the dark even waters, she and Delaurier; and the canoe was quiet.

It had been raining; the night air, deliciously fragrant with the subtle odours of pine and fir and hemlock, that was wafted across Lac d'Amour by the merest suggestion of a breeze. The long quavering cry of a loon, somewhere down there among the rushes and water-pads; the solemn hoo-hoo! of an owl calling from a distant pine, and the far-away roar of the rapids at the lake outlet were the only sounds that disturbed the vast mysterious silence.

In the moon's lustre, Delaurier's paddle blade shone brightly as it rested across the canoe, tiny drops glistening when the water fell from it.

"Annette——"

She stopped dabbling her fingers, and looked at him. "Oui?"

"Annette, ah'm—ah'm——" The big French Canadian stammered awkwardly.

"Oui?" she said again, a ripple of laughter in her soft voice.

"Ah'm crazee wit lo—ove for you, cherie!" The impassioned words burst from his lips as water rushes

through a broken dam. He was shaking all over with emotion, and the canoe trembled, little undulations running away into the darkness on either side.

The girl laughed, her tones harmonising with the unutterable peace and happiness of Nature. "She sat there, curled up in bow, a very picture of wild beauty. Two long braids of black hair reached to her waist, their ends coiled in her lap; big calm eyes like those of an undisturbed caribou; delicately chiselled face. A slim, powerful figure in her tanned deerskin jacket and short skirt.

"An' so you lo—ove moi, hein?"

"Ah Dieu!" He reached a giant arm across the thwart, and tried to catch her hand. She pelted him with the clammy lily-pads, and he drew back.

"You always mak' amuse wit' me, Annette, an' eet hurrt ver' bad—ici!" thumping himself over his heart.

She leaned back indolently, her head on one side, studying him. "Not so ba—ad, Henri; you beeg mans, an'—" she put her head on the other side—"an' eef you cut h'off dose mustaches, lo—ok très fine!"

"Ah goin' tak' h'off to-mor'!" he answered eagerly, reaching forward again.

More lily-pads!

"Attends minute!" He waited.

"An' eef you mak' shorrt dose hair eet would be ver' joli!" Henri was mute for an instant. The masses of curls that dropped across his huge shoulders were the pride of his heart.

"Eh bien—ah tak' h'off!"

"Oh la—la!" Annette wriggled beyond his grasp—  
"Ah'm no say ah marrie you, grand animal!"

"Coquette!" he grumbled, took up the paddle and pushed furiously to vent himself.

She watched him idly, noting the play of his monster forearm and bicep muscles as they rose and fell under the tawny sun-burned skin. And little by little admiration crept into her eyes. Woman-like, she appreciated his enormous strength, and revelled in the fact that he loved her; woman-like also, she delighted in holding him off, tantalising his big simple nature.

The canoe darted on, a full length at every sweep of his arms.

"Where go?" she asked.

Her hands were clasped behind her head. Mad-deningly beautiful she was to him, and he pushed harder than ever, silent to the question. He did not know that she loved him too; how should he? But as they swept on, parting the lake surface with liquid murmurs and lines of sparkling bubbles, a plan formed in his mind to find out.

The girl was quiet, with eyes half closed, enjoying the rhythmic swing and sag of the little birch-bark craft.

*Ha! Ha! Ha—i—i—i!* The loon laughed long and shrill at the sight of something going so fast over his domain. The owl had found a friend across Lac d'Amour, and the different toned calls to each came often.

Higher and higher the forest grew above them, stiff and motionless, as if each peaked top were an index finger to some one of the twinkling myriads of stars.

Their sharp-cut shadows fell athwart the lake sombrely. Just ahead a gigantic fir reared its top far above the rest. A grey boulder marked its foot. With a deft swing Delaurier stopped the canoe, its bow resting lightly on the pebbles of the beach.

Annette looked round. "Eh b'en?"

"Dees place," Henri began, drawing his paddle across his knees and pulling out his pipe—"dees place she call 'Le Rocher d'Alcyon'; you nevaire hear—dees place?" She shook her head.

"B'en, ah'm goin' tell to you wan leetle storee, hein?"

"Bon, Henri,—Ah'm leesten!" She settled herself comfortably, surprised a little at his calmness, but eager to hear, because Henri could tell wonderful "storee."

He lighted his pipe, the match throwing his fine strong face into clear relief against the blackness beyond.

"Long—long taim 'go, w'en de Indiens dey here—dere, all 'roun',—was leetle ol' feller call Gibaud—Fallace Gibaud. He was Canayen—lak' me an' you. An' wit dees Gibaud dere leeve Alcyon, his daughtaire. She was—ah—magnifique, weet dose—dose—Bah!" he snorted, "she was so fine, jolie lak' you, cherie." He drew a deep breath, took a long pull at the pipe. "Gibaud he mak' trap for de fur; Alcyon she feex de skeens, mak' snowshoo, tak' care de 'ouse. La—bas"—he pointed to a cliff-bound point that reached out into the lake—"dere was le camp h'of dose Cree Indians. Le Nuage Noir (Black Cloud) was de chief, an' beeg strong Indien; good Indien too! B'en, he come to lo—ove Alcyon lak'

ah lo—ove you!" He waited to let his words have deep effect. She leaned forward slightly, listening with evident intentness.

"Le Nuage Noir he mak' present de fines' skeens to Alcyon, de bessis caribou, de bigges' poile d'ours (bear skin). He mak' weet his han's dat bead jackete an' mocasse. Do ever'ting for show lo—ove to Alcyon."

"Onlee Indien!" the girl sniffed, "an' have plent' wives!"

"Non cherie, no lak' dat—Le Nuage Noir he no have wives yet 'tall; an' he say he nevaire have nobodee—jus' Alcyon. Baimby she begin t'ink she lak' Nuage Noir ver' mooch, an' wan night, lak' a dees, he brring Alcyon jus' here—sam' place, an' dey seet down on dat rocher." He motioned to the grim boulder. The girl looked at it hard, vivid pictures passing in her mind.

"He tell to Alcyon he want her for wife, an' mak' promesse nevaire for have no oddaire wives. Baimby she say—*Oui*, s'posen' ol' Gibaud, he lak'."

"W'at de faddaire say?" Annette was curiously excited.

He smoked in silence; it was his turn to tease now.

"No so fast, petite—Ah tell h'all!" and he chuckled.

"Mauvais bete!" She threw drops of water at him from the ends of her graceful fingers.

"B'en, Le Nuage Noir he tak' her to 'ouse, an' stay h'on de shor' een canot. Baimby Alcyon she com' ronnen' down. 'Go queeck—va!' she cry, 'Père, he goin' shoot you!' Den—*Pan!* go gun. Ol'

Gibaud he no woun' nor kill. Le Nuage Noir get ver' angree, jomp h'out canot, pull knife, et voila—wan—two—t'ree. Gibaud he dead!"

The girl shuddered. "Un meurtre" (murder), she whispered.

Delaurier nodded emphatically. "Si, but he lo—ove Alcyon; ol' Gibaud he try for kill, an' Nuage Noir kill Gibaud—voila!"

"You slow lak' de tree grow!" Annette said impatiently. "W'at 'appen den? Alcyon she no lak' Indien no mor', hein?"

"W'at you do, s'posen' you in sam' place?" She was silent; then—

"She lo—ove d'Indien ver', ver' bad?"

"An—ha." (Yes.)

The great moon waned, dropping nearer and nearer to the forest line. Then the jagged peaks were silhouetted against its round brilliant face—black and sharp. Then gloom. Pale mists rose in the coves and drifted out over the open lake, wreathing and twisting in the draught, while the stars shone stronger than ever, and were faithfully duplicated on the even surface beneath. The essence of Nature's life breathed across the two in the canoe, softly, luxuriantly—dream-like. Everything seemed far away, save the giant fir and the chill gleam of the boulder. Even the noise of turbulent waters, rapidly dashing, came from a greater distance than before; and the owls had finished their conversation. Sometimes, at long intervals, the loon tried to laugh; seeing nothing to laugh at, the attempt finished in a wild shriek that woke slumbering echoes from the iron-bound sides of Mont

Kenard. Back and forth they volleyed between Mont Kenard and Coligne de Loup, growing fainter at each rebound;—fainter—farther away—gone.

From every point of the heavens shooting stars darted into sight—flashed hotly, and died. Some had long tails that scintillated fire-like; others came in sight only to be lost instantly. But near the canoe each pebble was plain.

She broke the quiet. "Ah marrie heem jus' sam' s'posen' ah lo—ove *ver'* bad!"

The man's muscles throbbed and stretched their utmost under the skin; but his voice was steady: "An' eef *ah* was Le Nuage Noir, an' *you* was Alcyon, an' *ah* cut your faddaire hees heartt, you lo—ove me jus' sam'?"

"Oui!"

The word escaped her lips before she realised what she had said. He crashed over the thwart, a wild, ungovernable feeling mastering him. She was but a bit of clay in his arms, and he kissed her roughly, hurting her. A shine of something glinted into his eyes; he drew back, and the girl sheathed the little knife in her jacket. Both were breathing hard; he with happiness, she holding him off, furious that he had trapped her.

"Beas'—beas'—*animal!*" she hissed, her teeth clenched. Savage and feline she was, but he knew that she loved him, and *that* knowledge drove him mad.

*Ha! Ha! Ha—i—i—i!* The loon heard the unseemly disturbance in his territory; had swum to the nearest point, and now laughed immoderately.

"Leesten' you, Henri!"

"Ah'm leesten." She put both hands on the splintered edges of the thwart—"How ah know you no mak' lie to me? How ah know dat *you* know dose t'ings you talk h'about? How ees dat you mak' kees wit' me wid-h'out my say 'Oui'?" He hesitated, and filled his pipe. She waited, peering at him there in the stern, a massive bulk against the stars.

"Ah 'ave no tell to you w'at 'appen! Alcyon she go wit' Le Nuage Noir back to jus' sam' Rocher (rock). Dey stay dere long taim. You see een dees place"—he drew the paddle blade along a furrow in the boulder—"dees ees w'ere her tear dey go—to Lac d'Amour. An' den dey startt down de rapids for de weegwame La Nuage Noir 'ave for Alcyon on night de la noce (wedding night). Bot' drrown—la bas!—So Gibaud, d'Indien an' Alcyon h'all gone!"

"W'at dat 'ave do weet you an' me, hein?"

"Lak dees, ma cherie—eet ees ol' taim legende dat eef mans an' fille lo—ove ver' mooch, an' come here, an' dat deir lo—ove ees strrong—lak' you an' me—de mans mus' call h'on Alcyon an' Le Nuage Noir."

Annette smiled contemptuously. "An' dat's w'at you call showen' to me dat you lo—ove?"

He leaned forward, eyes stern. "S'posen' ah call dose two for signe dat dey lak' you an' me marrie?—Dat's de ol' taim signe, cherie?"

"You no can!" she muttered.

"Ah call! An' eef come, you marrie me?" She looked deep into his grey-blue eyes, shrinking from the fierceness therein, yet loving him.

"Oui."

He put away the pipe, took off his furred cap, and stood up. First to the North, then to the West, East, and South he turned. Annette watched, a feeling of awe in her mind.

"Alcyon, Alcyon, je t'prie  
De venir a moi dans mon envie—  
Sur Lac d'Amour.  
Viens et Le Nuage Noir  
Ici, maintenant, j'attends ce soir  
Pour toi.

Si t'pense des jours passés  
Viens donc et m'enlevez  
Les Nuages Noires'.  
Annette, elle me doute beaucoup,  
Moi, j deviens-bien vitement fou  
Pour elle—Apparisez !"

She clapped her hands softly. "Poete—you!" Then she became rigid, her eyes fixed on the grey boulder.

"See—lo—ok—dere!" He stared at the grim granite; it was, to him, just a rock that stood out boldly from the roots of the great fir.

"Ah see not'ing," he said laconically—"onlee rocher!"

She drew her eyes away from that which *she* saw for an instant—"You no *see*, Henri?"

"Not'ing!"

She saw a beautiful gossamer-like girl sitting disconsolate on the boulder. Tears trickled from her eyes, found their way down to the furrow in the boulder, and ran away into the lake. A vague apparition, but true to every detail. Annette looked

into the fathomless eyes. They stared back, full of gladness.

"You no see, Henri?" she breathed. And as she saw and watched—a mysterious sense of fear in her heart—Delaurier relaxed his grasp on the paddle. His face grew tense and drawn.

"Dere ees Le Nuage Noir h'on de rocher!"

"W'ere, w'ere? Ah see onlee Alcyon!"

"An' me, ah see onlee l'Indien. He dere wit' 'appiness an' bonne chance een his eyez."

The girl searched the surface of the boulder with all the power of her vision. Nothing there save the figure of Alcyon. And little by little Annette's superstitious fears were aroused; augmented by Delaurier's fixed glare towards the boulder. She saw a girl that he could not see. He saw an Indian that did not enter into her vision.

To him Le Nuage Noir was magnificent—resplendent with paint and wampum.

"You no can see Nuage Noir?"

"Non! Onlee Alcyon!" Annette muttered.

Delaurier leaped from the canoe,

"Alcyon!—Le Nuage Noir,  
Moi je suis en desespoir;  
Montrez vous—ensemble!"

"An—ha!"

Annette saw *two* figures seated on the boulder.

The giant Canadian leaned against the stern of the canoe weakly. "You belief' ah lo—ove you?"

She was won. And as he held her in his arms her lips close to his, the phantom figures disappeared from the rock, while the giant fir stood guard.

"Ah lo—ove you," she whispered.

"An' me, lak' Nuage Noir, ah'm lo—ove you h'alway. W'en de snow she fall—w'en de leafs dey co'me, w'en h'all de saisons pass, ah lo—ove you!"

She did not resist then, and as their lips touched, he murmured—"La Nuit d'Alcyon."

U

## THE OUTCASTS

"MA! Ma! They's a-comin'! They's *a-comin'*!"

"Laws sakes, Neddy Blend, you'll drive me plumer distraction! Keep still!—wish I'd left you ter hum!" This with an energetic jerk that lifted the aforesaid youth several inches from the dusty village sidewalk.

"Let him be, Jane! You wuz wusser 'n that when you wuz his age!" Grandma Wilson tightened her grip on a magnificent parasol, and shook her ample skirts about her feet with becoming dignity, for the circus was really in town at last.

The gorgeous bills that the advance agent had plastered on Eliah North's front barn; at the back of Tim Wells's new shed, and in heaven knows how many other desirable and carefully selected locations, were not "jest stuff an' nonsense" after all!

Early this beautiful June morning the long special train of Whiting's "Most Glorious and Greatest Show on Earth" had pulled in on the sidings of Nantville, See-Tee (as the natives pronounce it).

Tommy Barnes was in the hay-loft sucking eggs before any one else in his household were awake, but he shared the honour of *knowing* that the circus

had come, with none; therefore the egg stains on his jacket passed unnoticed.

Off the hay, down the "main-street" shrieking "It's come! It's come!" he tore, his bare feet splutting in the dust.

And so by eight o'clock flags were flying. "Store" windows "kind o' cleaned up"—as the butcher put it, when he arranged piles of pigs' feet into the word Welcome on the stone slab outside—and the inhabitants walked slowly to and fro, all in their "meetin'" clothes. Vehicles of every description passed in one long stream, their occupants giggling and waving handkerchiefs in the bright sunshine.

Gaiety, laughter, pretty faces, eager children, tugging and screaming, and fond mothers, alternately giving the "jest you hush-up" order, and scolding Pa because his pants warn't hung proper, filled the narrow thoroughfare completely.

The lilacs were all in bloom in front yards; pansies and daffodils lined prim walks, and great weeping willows drooped their long verdure over the roadway, swinging gracefully in the breeze. It was warm; "jest fine!" Mother Blend remarked to Sister Tycomb. "Allus is, circus day!" the elderly spinster-maiden answered with asperity.

"Don't ye like th' circus, Sarah?" It so happened that Sarah didn't—and said so.

"Stay hum then!" Mrs Blend turned her broad back defiantly and yanked Pa's cravat still further under his ear—which operation he bore with due meekness.

"There's Lizzie Johnson!—*Liz-zie!*—She don't heer me!—Run over, Pa, and ketch her!—Hurry now!" Pa swallowed his "chaw" in a fit of mental

aberration, but started bravely; stubbed his toe on a match or something and fell flat in the dust.

"Thar' now, ye've done it! Hain't I told ye allus ter *look* afore ye leap?"

Ma Blend let go of Neddy's hand to wring hers in desperation. At this unlooked-for liberty Neddy gasped once, then fled, dodging through the crowd like a rabbit. Ma opened her mouth to scream; the excitement was too great though, and she set all sail in pursuit, while Pa ruefully picked his lanky self from things earth-earthly.

"Come here this instant, Neddy Deland Blend! Ye heer *me*? I'll wollop ye good when I catches ye! See 'f I don't!"

The happy crowd roared with laughter, and got in the good lady's way—accidentally, of course. When she extricated herself, Neddy was nowhere in sight. Realising the hopelessness of the chase, she decided that Pa would have to stand the brunt of her ire; because have it out she *would*, and what's more, quick! (That which occurred is too painful to relate.)

A blast of bugles! The roll and rat-a-tat-tat boom of drums! The grand Spectacular Parade had started. First came Heralds on jaded horses that were hidden as much as possible by time-and-travel-worn draperies. Then the Band Waggon! "See, the Conquering Hero Comes" its red-jacketed slaves played, as, prancing on the right wheel horse of the cook-wagon, Whiting himself followed, bowing on either side. Next were the "Lady Riders," in soiled fawn habits and tall hats. Close behind were the Jockeys; then another band that dealt out

"Marching through Georgia" most efficiently. Four weary elephants ambled, or rather shuffled by, their little eyes half closed, their trunks almost trailing between their legs. A solitary, lean giraffe stuck its head from the hole in the roof of the next wagon, and tried pathetically to reach the weeping willow branches. As far as it could see them the big soft eyes watched hungrily. Drawn by a spike team came a divided cage on wheels. In one compartment cowered half a dozen monkeys, huddled together, and in the other side a mangy leopard stared dully over the crowd, looking towards the fresh green woods beyond the sparkling river. Then more cages with sullen, half-starved brutes, whose only existence was continual imprisonment and suffering. The lion would gladly have lain down besides some kind-hearted person's hearth and lapped milk from the baby's saucer. Yet he was labelled "Very Dangerous and Savage! Keep away!" After all these came the Clowns. They tried to be funny, and were so to the inhabitants of Nantville, See-Tee. They had to be, for their pay was graded according to the laughter. Boss Whiting heard from the crowd. Following them were the fakirs and peanutmen; more Heralds—then FINIS.

The gay crowds pressed on, eagerly taking in every shriek of the Steam Calliope that warbled the "Blue Danube" excruciatingly. Everyone happy and care-free; all looking forward to the "Show."

## II

"Damn!" the "Bearded Lady" exclaimed, as he looked at himself in a bit of mirror three inches square.

"Denny, has my hair been this way in parade?" (The long elastic that held the marvellous hirsute appendage was plainly visible over one ear.)

"Don't ask me!" the Fattest Man on Earth answered gruffly, "I've had troubles of my own! This cussed pillow's been stickin' out of a split in my coat, and I was so all-fired hot the sweat's run down into them meal bags on my legs, an' made dough out of 'em!"

"Oh, for Gawd's sake shut up over there!" came the most unladylike remark from beyond the low canvas partition that divided the dressing tent into one part for "Males" and the other for "Ladies."

"You guys give me the Willies! How'd you like ter have lost yer tattoed tights and——"

"Don't use 'em!" The "Bearded Lady," now resolved into a man, chuckled. "Come over here an' we'll paint some fine ones on you!" added the "Sword Swallowing Wonder of the Globe" facetiously.

"You guys think yer smart, don't yer? I wish ——" A shrill scream interrupted this pleasant conversation.

"Your nasty snake's got down my back! *Take it out!*" More screams! Sounds of violent scuffling, a pause, then a babel of "ladies'" voices.

"You've done tore my ballet skirt!"

"Didn't! Put yer foot in it yerself!"

"Who's got my powder box? Here you, Annie, cough it up will you?" Sound of a slap. "That 'll teach you to——"

"Gee!" the Fat Man said ironically, "what a peaceful family! Listen!"

"Gimmie that stockin'!"

"Shan't! It's mine!"

"You lie, that's real silk, an' it's mine! Yours is *cotton*!"

Suddenly an ominous pause.

"LADIES!" The thundering voice echoed in the hot tent. "What do I hear? Such a cursed noise. Any more of that, and I'll fine you a dollar apiece. Get busy for grub! Hustle!"

Whiting strode in to the men's side. "Come, come, boys; shake your feet! It's going to be a big day for us!—a *big day*!"

"For you, you mean!" the Card-sharp and Mountebank grumbled under his breath. "Precious damned little us 'll see of it. He turned cheerfully enough as Whiting sang out—"Bennett!"

"What?"

"You ready?"

"Yep!"

"Come out here." The Proprietor led him off behind the horse tent.

"Say—I've got hold of a good thing, Bennett—if you can do it!" He tipped his hat over one ear, winked slowly, thrust his thumbs in the armpits of his plaid waistcoat, teetering slowly from his heels to his toes the while.

"Well, spit it out then!"

Frank Bennett's eyes were heavy, and great dark rings hung low on his cheeks. The lines of his strong face were deep furrowed, almost like channels in sand where water trickles steadily. The once broad shoulders were bent, and his whole body showed hard work with little rest. His hands were very white and well kept. They had to be, because his job—when village police were not too wary—was to—shall we say—abstract the countryman's money by such safe means as the "vanishing pill," three-card montes, and sometime as a by-play, with a package of the "green goods."

Whiting's vicious grey-green eyes looked round furtively.

"How's yer hands? Good shape? Limber?"

"Guess so." The other picked his teeth laconically.

"When I was up at the hotel I run up against the craziest lookin' guy you ever saw. Regular introdoodle I was to him—all straight *there!* And I got talkin' about the Show, etcetery. He orders a drink, and—well he had a bunch of 'em. I 'slipped' mine—see? Then he gets tellin' me how hard he'd worked, and how he'd saved up 250 simoleons and was waitin' for \$200 more to go back home some'ere and get married, or some such lush yarn as that. I took him outside and pipes him off that I had a feller followin' the Show round 'cause he was gone on one of the girls. Ha! ha!—not so far wrong either, eh Bennett?" He did not see the flash in the other's eyes—"and that this feller had \$500 and was crazy about gamblin'—but N. G. at it. He swallowed the whole outfit, bait, line, pole, and darn

near me along too. He's comin' down to-night after the show; I'll lend you a good suit and some o' my sparklers, and—you do the rest, eh? It's the easiest ever!"

"What do I get?" Bennett's voice was unemotional.

"Well—er—let's say \$50?"

"Nix for mine!"

"\$75?"

"Nix!"

"\$100?"

"Make it \$125 and I'll think about it; that's half, and I do all the work and run all the risk."

"Yes, but I found——"

"Oh hell, it's hot out here and I'm hungry. Take it or leave it!"

"All right;—it's a go?"

"Put it down—black and white!"

"Damn you!" the proprietor whispered as he scribbled hastily on a leaf in his note-book. Bennett shoved it in his trousers pocket and walked off. So did Whiting, cursing and growling. "Rotten out-cast 's all you are!" he muttered; "if it hadn't been for me pickin' you up on the track out at——"

"Fine, Guv'nor, FINE!" One of the ticket-sellers rushed up to him,—“goin' like butter on a hot day! We'll have ter have more tickets pretty soon!"

"All right—all right!"

One hundred and twenty-five dollars! The Card-sharper's eyes shone as they had not in a long time, and there was life in his movements, a suggestion of elasticity in his step as he entered the grub tent.

Everyone eats together, men and women, in a travelling circus, and he went to his accustomed seat next to Alice Townsend—known to the public as Princess Ramond, the Beautiful Dare-Devil Bare-Back Rider.

The girl was still young, and a hard struggle for life had not yet effaced a certain sad beauty of expression. Perhaps it lay in the depth of her brown eyes, or it may have been the poise of a small head that was covered with bronze-brown hair, or again in the lines of her mouth. Who can tell? Undeniably it was there, and Fred Bennett saw it; had recognised it for a long time. No other man in the Show interfered with his attentions to her, and as such things are of everyday occurrence, gave no particular notice when he got fresh water for her in the mornings, or helped her strap her dress box, or did the thousand and one little things that a man can do to smooth the rough way of a girl's life with a travelling Show, and that one of the cheapest.

When knives and forks were clattering their loudest and every member of the crowd eating his or her hardest, and shouting for this or that between mouthfuls, she leaned near him.

"I heard it all!"

"What?" controlling his features.

"\$125!"

"Well?"

"That's enough for you and me to skip on, Freddy—what with the \$30 I've got."

"You mean it?" he whispered back, his eyes on his food so that none of the others might suspect anything.

"Haven't I always told you, honey, that I'd go?" Her voice had a peculiarly rich cadence, a strangely fascinating rhythm.

He drew a deep breath.

"All right, girlie!"

"When?"

"To-night, after the—er!"

That was all.

She went out to dress, and he lounged over towards the now rapidly filling "big tent." Many thoughts whirled through his shrewd mind. He loved the girl deeply.

"We'll be married at Palmer," he soliloquised—"that's fifteen miles. Guess I'll see about a rig now. I can make enough with the cards easy to keep us going, and maybe get a line on the steamers!"

Bennett was a good "phony" with the pasteboards, and the "pill" was child's play for him. As he passed the main entrance he stopped, watching the crowd pressing in. A world of cynicism was in his eyes; he smiled grimly at the laughter, the merry jests of man and maid, the awed faces of children as they viewed the huge negro "barker" in gold braid and glittering helmet. They listened to the bellowing that issued from between his white teeth in amazed wonderment.

"Right this a-way, lad'es 'n' gents! Step right up hyah an' buy yoh tickets! Show's a-goin' t' begin! Don't miss th' inside parade! Don't cost nothin' more ter see it; don't miss it, *Ah say!*" These last words rolled out with tremendous volume.

"Poor fools!" Bennett thought as he lighted a

cigarette; "believe anything they see or hear—do anything you tell 'em to, and *happy*"—he lingered contemptuously on the word—even repeated it—"'*hap-py*' in it. There's no happiness in the world—only a kind of gratification that's called the real thing. You do what you like, because you like to do it—you're gratified—and that's bein' *happy*, is it?"

He turned back abruptly, towards the dressing tent. Alice, perched on the broad rump of her "trick" horse, passed him with a cheery smile and a nod. Harry Thomson—chief clown of the show, and boss of the commissariat department, was putting the last splashes of red on his lips and cheeks. He eyed Bennett.

"Hell of a life! I'm so dead beat my bones rattle!" He went on with his make-up. "What's the matter with you, Freddy?"—as the other stared moodily at the trodden grass under their feet—"Homesick?"

Bennett laughed, a note of bitterness in his deep voice. "Might be, if I had one!"

The clown adjusted his cornucopia cap, drew his ruffle tighter, and lifted the flap of canvas—"Brace up, old man; it's all in the game. Better luck in the next world."

Bennett was alone. He listened to the shouts and noises of the ring-side beyond. He listened, yes; but there were such world-worn sounds that they meant no more to him than does the bubbling tinkle of a brook mean to the farmer who has been brought up beside it.

"Old—old game!" he whispered, looking at a


grinning mask that stuck up, harshly brutal, on a pitchfork; "and it's got to go on for us—Al' and me, —always."

A long silence in the sweltering interior. A wasp buzzed angrily, trying to get out; a great blue-bottle fly crawled into the mouth of the mask and disappeared. He watched the trivial incidents heedlessly.

Time slipped by; it was his turn now. Gathering the cards, the little table, some silk handkerchiefs, a guinea-pig, a rabbit, and some real and imitation roses in a basket, he went out.

When the nasal whine of the announcer had died away, and the curious hush of expectancy hung on the great crowd, he began his "stunts" on the platform; but his mind was not in the work. After all it was merely a mechanically repeated affair day by day, week by week; and the roar of applause as the guinea-pig changed into roses or *vice-versâ* struck on unanswering ears. As "the kind gentleman over there" lent his watch, he pounded it to bits carelessly, then returned the same watch with cold indifference. Bennett had always been a drawing card; had always "made good"; therefore he was used to the applause that shook the canvas. He bowed perfunctorily, and stalked across the sawdust, thinking only of \$125, and to-night.

The same chit-chat in the dressing tent, the familiar reek of sweated clothes and bad cigars. Always the same. He went up to the village in the cool of the evening to get away from it, to have a quiet meal somewhere. The ache in his head for peace was strangely powerful to-night.



Cosy lights glinted from cottage windows. He could not help seeing children dancing about within, imitating the clowns, or the "lady that rid th'out saddle er bridle er clo'es!" Groups of young people sat on piazza steps, white dresses gleaming whiter than the rhododendrons in full bloom, black suits of men, the blacker beside them.

"And th' man thet did them cyard tricks! My! Wan't he jest real *great*? Mighty pert an' good-lookin' too!" he heard a merry girl say. An impulse seized him to tell them that they were all fools—that he was nothing but a charlatan. But no, he could not do that—of course not!

He walked slowly along, now stepping on the road to avoid the passers-by, then lingering when he recognised old tunes played on fiddles or accordions. They were old, but to him—embittered and calloused by a grim destiny—as he was—they seemed *new*; he walked still more slowly, therefore—loath to lose a single note.

The little hotel seemed inviting; darkly cool, clean with that peculiar country odour, its doors swung wide, to him. He entered, and asked for supper. Opposite him sat a tall, rawboned man of about thirty. He had all the ear-marks of a Westerner, and his whole being bespoke hard manual labour. The stranger was quiet, answering Bennett's attempts at conversation in monosyllables and grunts—affirmative or negative. The Card-sharper leaned back comfortably after the plain, wholesome meal, and sighed. The stranger had gone.

"Some day, Al, you and me 'll have a little home in the country and quit it all, eh, girlie?" He

seemed to listen for her answer. "Outcast I've been all my life, but the end's in sight at last—at last! To-night is the beginning of the grand final parade for mine."

"Have a drink?" someone asked as he was going down the steps.

"Much obliged—never touch it."

"Lucky!" the other said curtly.

Bennett glanced up to see who another man might be that also recognised this fact, but all he saw was a tall, stooping back and the brim of a wide felt hat pulled well down over ears that almost flapped.

All but the "big" tent and the dressing shelter were down; poles, rigging, and pegs stowed away, and the weary helpers stood about, waiting for the strains of "Good-night, Ladies," that always marked the end of one day's work and almost the beginning of the next.

Bennett was motionless in the noisy darkness. Figures hurried systematically, the rustling of feet through long grasses recording their proximity to him. The giant candelabra of lamps came down with a run, leaving the canvas shrouded in a grey dimness of outline against the stars. Hoarse orders, the rattle of blocks and tackle, the whine of sheaves, and horses' restless stamping, all formed a curious monotone of sounds, as though each, by dint of time, had become harmonised with the rest.

The trickster's eyes were accustomed to the scene. He stepped nonchalantly aside as a long pole fell with a crash where he had stood. Men running with

apparent tangles of rope passed, but he was always just out of their way.

Then Alice appeared, slipping towards him from the gloom, bag in hand. He noted the trim set of her figure in relief against the last wall of the tent.

"One of those rainbow things?" he asked, as the end of something soft blew across his face.

She pulled the veil back.

"You're an' owl, Fred!" He took the bag, changed his step to match hers.

"I wish I were as wise!"

The girl caught the inflection of irony in his voice.

"Meaning that you are not 'wise' to-night?"

He looked down at the pale contour of her face. "My dear girl, who can tell us when we 'are wise' or when we are not? I never have seemed to be able to judge—impartially!"

She sighed, and the hand that rested on his arm shook slightly. They walked on silently. At the end of the Fair grounds he looked back. The level space vanished boundless into shadows beyond; empty and still.

"There's an' end to *that* life!" he murmured.

She smiled pathetically. "But happiness is in store for us?" Bennett did not answer at once. "Yes"—slowly—"yes, Alice, force of circumstances gives us a lift in that direction."

The hotel lights twinkled far down the road, whose much-disturbed dust had settled thickly on hedges and stone walls.

Their footfalls were muffled.

"Why 'circumstances,' Fred?"

"The \$125 I'll get to-night, and—well—the fact that you joined the Show are 'circumstances.'"

"We'll *never* go back to the hopelessness of your—of the old life, will we?"

There was a ring of something new to his ears in her words. They passed under an arc light; its glare fell harshly on his features. "Fred?"—timidly—"after *to-night*, work 'on the level,' will you?"

"And starve?" he answered.

"No! We *can* do without the—the—" she stammered; stopped confusedly.

"Go on, say it, Allie! Without the 'phony' work! God knows I wish I could, but it's up to me to grub and dress *you* now!" His careless laugh woke an echo from a group of cow barns near by. The hotel was but a block away.

"An outcast, a man without a home or a *friend* knows no choice," he added quietly.

"I'd rather starve—and have you quit it!" She spoke with the earnest simplicity that conveys truth. "I'm pretty near alone too; just a brother in Sing Sing for twenty years!"

He gave up the bag at the hotel steps. "It won't take long. Wait for me upstairs, and keep out of sight."

The loungers, gossiping on tilted chairs, stared. Bennett disappeared.

She threw herself limply on the iron cot in the cheap attic room.

"He *will* give it up for me!" she whispered exultantly, letting dream thoughts of a decent future for them both run riot. It was her first "looking forward" to something real, and as her eyes

wandered among the depths beyond the stars, she was content. And yet not quite.

"I wonder who he's working?" She could see him in his "swell togs," playing with expressionless face, taking the ever-present risk of discovery with the cool calculation that is never born in man—always acquired.

"This will finish—" she was ashamed of the words that forced themselves to utterance—"crooked play and worse!" Silence. Half-past eleven! She jumped up, lighted a candle and stared at herself in the wobbly mirror. A dash of powder where dark lines of weariness showed too plainly; a hairpin thrust in here, another there; a jerk at her skirt-band to get it straight—"Cheer up!" "This won't do!"—talking to her reflection. "It's kill or cure to-night; and you can't do it if you look like a ten-year-old rag doll out of a children's hospital, Alice Taylor!" Barely had she time to hide the frayed end of her "rat," hearing his step. The door creaked grudgingly open.

"You have been—?" She controlled herself by sheer force of will. The gambler shut the door carefully, swung round to the cot and sat down. His eyes were brilliant in the faint yellow light.

"Pinched?" she whispered.

"Worse!" He dropped his head between his hands. "Lost my nerve—got sentimental when I had it all—gave it back—got the bounce—and—that's all."

The girl stared at his bowed head.

"Why?" she asked then, her dreams fading so fast.

He stood up, shook himself. "Because he's an old friend of days that were bright to me; full of promise, full of everything. I didn't know him, no names were mentioned, and I cleaned him out." He walked slowly to and fro.

"Well?" The distant notes of a whip-poor-will's plaintive call floated in.

"By a chance word I recognised him. He was dead broke, needed the money quick to bring his sister East and save her life by an operation or something. I—" he put his hands on the girl's shoulders gently—"I used to love her, Allie. He didn't squeal about losing—said he'd had a fair show, and asked *me* the loan of a dollar to telegraph her that he was sick and couldn't get home. It was hard—My God!" he said hoarsely—"I hadn't the heart to take it! Even for your sake." Bennett leaned against the window-sill.

Alice could not realise at once that her way and his parted here. She fought against the thought wildly; though with a woman's prophetic intuition she knew that memories had destroyed his love. She picked nervously at a fringe of the towel on the bureau.

He did not move.

"Then it's—it's all off for you and me?"

Bennett's figure straightened slowly—"Would you want it any other way?"—keeping his face from her.

"No," she said quickly—"I wouldn't—not now." Silence again.

The candle flame wavered in the little draught. She watched it idly. Then she closed her bag, put on her hat and jacket. "Stamford to-morrow, Fred;

I'm awful tired. How do I get to the train?" The pain in her voice hurt him.

"I'll take you down."

"Oh, no;" she ~~breathed~~ rather than spoke—"just tell me the way, and—Freddy, I don't blame you. I guess I'm glad you were on the level, but I'm not sure. Say—keep straight! Think of those old days often; they'll help you."

She hesitated—"What are you going to do?"

"God knows!"

He turned abruptly when she touched him. "Good luck, dear, and——" Their hands fell apart as a tall, lanky figure, whose sombrero was well pulled down, pushed open the door.

"Been a-huntin' ye, Fred, all over," the deep voice said. "Read that." Bennett held the telegraph blank to the light, and read—

Silas Marvin,

Long View Hotel,

Nantville, Ct.

Nellie died peacefully this morning.

JACK.

He handed the paper to the girl; his heart turning instinctively to her for comfort.

"Ye'd oughter ter be proud of Fred, Missus. He didn't tell me he was married; but I've deescovered everythin' else, and ef ye two be tired o' circusin', why come out to my shack. There's room fur a man like him and there's room for his wife, incause I kind o' feel she's put him straight. Never mind the car-fare! I know ye're broke, but not so bad that ye

can't be stuck together like new. What do ye say?"

Wide-eyed the girl had listened. "But we——" Bennett interrupted her quickly. "My wife and I *will* go, Tom. Bless you for——" Marvin was half out of the room already—"Train goes eight forty!" He flung the words over his shoulder, slamming the door.

Bennett put his arms around her. "Do you mean it?" she sobbed.

He smoothed her hair tenderly—"We're outcasts no longer."

## LONESOME VALLEY AND COBE

JUST where the waters of Big Lick Creek join those of Devil's Run at the foot of the North Carolina Mountains, Cobe Nelson stopped his mules at the ford and blocked the wheels of the heavy canvas-covered schooner.

"Heu-u, boys!" he shouted, with Southern drawl. The animals flopped their ears gratefully.

Cobe's tall, gaunt figure, in high boots, corduroy trousers, and grey flannel shirt, loomed aggressively in the soft afternoon sunlight; his quick-moving grey eyes shone with health and the vigour of manhood in its prime.

"Lordy, Lordy!" he said, aloud. "Th' roads be suah 'nough bad!"

Red clay was plastered high on the wagon's sideboards and had spattered on the white canvas. He filled his pipe while the thrush and the orioles sang their little vesper songs, fluttering gaily among the huge pines, darting to and fro across the murmuring stream.

"Ah reckon ma'll be kind o' anxious-like 'f ah

don't git home ter-night, an' it's eight mile! Wall—git up—git up, boys!"

As one the four mules lunged ahead, the wagon creaking and swaying. Up and up the winding, narrow road that sometimes led along steeps that fell hundreds of feet, and again through twisting defiles where there was barely room for the mules.

Now and then Cobe's hand would almost unconsciously slip toward a pocket that was sewed on the inside of his shirt. It held a round, fat parcel.


"Reckon ma'll be tickled heaps this hyah trip!" he mused. "A hundred an' fohty gallons times two dollars makes two hundred an' eighty dollars; an' Lindy she-all kin hev swell fixin's foh we-all's weddin', suah 'nough!"

Whistling and humming, he stalked along beside the team.

"Haul up thar, Sambo! You-all's powehful lazy, 'pears to me!"

And then the last ridge was crossed. He applied the cumbersome wooden brakes and started down the long incline into Lonesome Valley. It was so named because for generations no one had lived there save the Nelsons, who made the best Double Shot, Copper-Distilled Apple Brandy in the whole of the county. Illicitly, yes, but Cobe argued as his father and grandfather had before him—what was the use of paying the government \$1.10 per gallon tax anyhow?

Revenue officers had been on the trail of the "still." They were always made welcome to Lonesome Valley, and asked to "kinder look round, an' hunt 's much as you-all like!"



Cobe and his mother—the only two left of a famous family—would chuckle as the Secret Service men bounded and thumped, prodded and searched walls, floors, outhouses, even the chicken-coops.

There was one young fellow to whom Cobe had “cottoned”—Charlie Wagstaff. He had made four attempts to find the Nelson “still,” and each time that he came he was heartily made to feel at home; after supper he and the big mountaineer would smoke together before a roaring fire; the native secure in the knowledge that no one save his mother, Linda Lee—the girl he was to marry soon—and he knew how to find his “works”; and the other using all his diplomacy and tact in trying to locate Cobe’s paraphernalia.

“Heu—heu-u!” The mules stopped.

“Be that yeou, Cobe?” an old voice called from the open door of a log cabin through which yellow beams streamed into the quiet star-darkness of the valley.

“Ya-as, ’m, back agin”—he lowered his voice —“safe ’gain!”

“Supper ’ll be thar when ye onhitch!”


“All raight, ’m!”

Shortly afterward he spread his big hands to the fire while a little shrunken form, whose eyes glistened brightly, took in with avidity all his news, nodding her head from time to time and chuckling.

“A good run! A good run, Cobe! An’ didn’ see no——” She whispered the last word.

“Mmm—Mmm!” (negatively).

They sat down to eat. Heaps of corn-pone, a



platter of sausage meat, dippers of coffee, and a jug of milk was the fare.

"Ah suah did feel maightly glad——" he was saying, when there came a rap on the door. His hand went to the money; it was there.

"Come on in!"

"Hello, Cobe! Good evening, Mrs Nelson!" Charlie Wagstaff entered cheerily.

"How-dy, Charlie, how-dy?" Cobe grasped the revenue officer's hand cordially.

"Finely, thanks! Didn't expect me, did you? Be honest, Cobe; did you?"

"Cayn't say ah did; but set down. Hev a bite?"

"Indeed I will! I've ridden a long way!"

"Sho, ye hev. Whar frum?"

"Been up at the Lee place for three weeks, pheasant-shooting, and had a rattling time!"

Cobe did not see the quick look Wagstaff gave him as he spoke, but the officer saw the change in the mountaineer's face.

Little was said during the meal, but when the old mother had gone to bed in the wee attic above, and the two men sat across the fire from each other as of yore, the Secret Service man spoke quietly, puffing the while on his pipe.

"Cobe, I've got you *this* time!"

"Got whut?" the other asked, with unusual gruffness.

Wagstaff looked at him through the blue haze of smoke.

"I know that you took one hundred and forty gallons to Mitchell, that you got two dollars a gallon for it, and that you have the money on you *now*! Is this *news* to you?"

"Thar's only one could 'a'——"

"Told?" Wagstaff finished the sentence easily. "You're right, Cobe; and that *one* did."

A whirlwind of thoughts ran rife in Nelson's big, simple mind. His mother—*never!* Linda Lee?—impossible! and yet? Wagstaff was clever. Wagstaff was shrewd. Wagstaff had a magnetic personality. Cobe called him "takin' in his ways," but it answered for the same thing. *And* Wagstaff had been three weeks at the Lee place. All these things he jumbled together.

"Yes, and if I do not mistake, the *one* will be here in an hour! You are not expected to be in the cabin, neither am I. The person will wake your mother, and warn her that I am after you again. You must listen!"

"Ah'll be damned 'f——" Cobe leaped to his feet and found himself staring into the barrel of a revolver that appeared mysteriously in Wagstaff's hand.

"I don't like to do this, Cobe, and you know it; but unless you will take my word that something will occur shortly as I have told you, I shall have to put these on"—clinking handcuffs. "Be reasonable, man; if I am wrong, I will never come here again! On the other hand, if I am right, you must go with me! That's fair."

Silence between the two while the fire crackled merrily, and their shadows were lost in the recesses of the cabin.

"You-all *cain't* be right, so ah reckon ah'll do as you-all say."

Wagstaff holstered his weapon.

There was no further conversation. From time to

time the officer looked at his watch, and the other stared moodily at the flames.

"Time is getting short, Cobe; let's hide."

The native followed into the wood-closet that was built close to the wall. They squatted on the tumbled mass of splittings, and Wagstaff pulled the rickety door almost shut.

Minutes passed slowly; Nelson's face was very white in the faint sheen that stole in through the cracks.

Then light steps sounded outside among the shavings. Wagstaff put his hand warningly on the other's knee. They heard the outer door opened very carefully; then stillness, save for their own restrained breathing.

"Ma Nelson? Ma?"

"Lindy!" Cobe muttered.

They could see the little girlish figure, masses of brown hair tumbling about her forehead and neck, creep to the foot of the attic ladder.

"Ma Nelson?" she called again, gently.

"Thet Lindy?" the shaky voice answered, sleepily, from above.

"Ya-as, 'm, an' listen, quick!" She went up half-way. "Charlie Wagstaff's after Cobe agin! He'll be hyah direc'ly, an' ah throwed th' 'worm' into th' crick 'hind th' stump at th' old ford, and rolled th' logs over th' openin'. You-all tell him so's he kin find it! Ah guess ah'll——"

She started down in fear as the old woman hissed: "Ye dratted fool ye, Lindy! Charlie's hyah!"

"Whar?" The girl's eyes became troubled like those of a hunted animal.

The mother descended.

"He *was* hyah with Cobe when ah went to bed! Cyan't ye learn t' shet up?"

Wagstaff saw that nothing more was to be gained. He gave the door a push.

The girl cried out sharply—

"Oh, Cobe, honey, ah suah didn' know!"

"In course ye didn', Lindy," the big man said softly. "Ah ain't a-blamin' ye a mite!" as the girl's eyes filled with tears, though no sobs came.

The mother's face grew hard and set, her lips drawn rigidly together.

"An' whut did ye tell Charlie when he wuz to you-all's place thet he come hyah so quick? Answer!" she snarled.

"She did not say a word!" Wagstaff interrupted. "I was the one who lied to her, and took my chances of finding out. I told her that I knew where the worm was hidden, and where the works are; that I was going to Mitchell for help first, and then coming here. She believed me, and, as you see, tried to get ahead of me to save Cobe."

As he finished the girl's figure seemed to loom taller and taller; she sprang forward, her face almost touching Wagstaff's.

"You-all frum de No'th call *thet* fair play? T' lie to a gal, jest a gal, an' ter tell her thet ye love her. Yes, he did!"—to Cobe—"an' he tried ter kiss me, an'—an'— My God, Cobe, *don't!*"

Wagstaff jumped, but too late; the heavy stick of wood struck him on the temple and everything turned black.

The girl shuddered gaspingly. "Ye've done killed him, Cobe!" she whispered.

He gazed stupidly at the inert heap on the dirty floor. "Ah reckon so," he answered dully. "An' ah've broke my promise ter him. He trusted me, but ah jest couldn' he'p it when ye said as how he'd made love ter ye, mah gal, mah litt' Lindy!"

She tried to speak, then stopped. He remembered afterward that he had wondered why.

When he rolled Wagstaff over, the latter groaned slightly.

"Didn' *all* kill him, Lindy; reckon ah'd better git his gun, tie him, an' light out o' this hyah section fur a while. Ye kin do's you-all like with 'm!"

None too gently he bound the officer's ankles and wrists, then dashed water over his face. Still the girl said nothing.

"Now ah'll hide th' worm in——" he whispered the place to the old woman, who eyed the unconscious man vengefully. The mountaineer went out into the night.

When he came back Wagstaff was on his elbow, muttering, incoherently, "You—know—Lindy—not—true,—trusted—oh—my God!" He fell forward, blood oozing from his ears.

"He's a-dyin', Cobe!" she breathed.

Nelson became frightened; he undid the lashings, and with her help bathed the livid bruise. Hours passed on, and at daylight Wagstaff opened his eyes.

"That wasn't fair, Cobe!" he said hoarsely. "I took your word, but because of Linda I——"

The savage nature of the mountaineer surged beyond bounds. He cocked Wagstaff's weapon.

"Ye've talked too much 'bout mah Lindy, an' ye

know too much, anyhow! Dead men's shoes follers no trails, so here——"

The girl jerked his arm as the revolver exploded. She put her hand instantly over her breast and her eyes were open wide, as though in astonishment.

"Ah reckon ye've shot me, Cobe," she said hesitatingly. So quiet did she seem that the mountaineer laughed. She held out her hand then. "See!"

The palm was red; he watched the red trickle down to her finger-tips in horrible fascination. And on the calico below her throat a stain broadened. She smiled faintly and dropped into his arms. Choking, he tore her dress open; the steady spurts showed the fatality of the wound.

"He'p, ma!" he almost shrieked.

Together they tried to stanch the blood, but it flowed steadily.

The wounded man got to his knees and dragged himself beside the girl; his wits were hazy from the blow still, and things danced before his eyes, but he got a finger in the bullet-hole.

"That — will — hold — a few — minutes," he whispered. "Make her talk, quick—artery—no—chance——" He was unconscious again.

As from a great distance she had heard his words, and forced her brain to action.

"Cobe?"

"Honey, mah Lindy, mah littl' Lindy, ah's hyah!"

"Cobe!"—the words were slow in coming—"ah—done—lied to—ye—ah did. Char-lie didn'—make no—love—t'—me—ner try—to—kiss—kiss—me ;

—ah—wuz—jest—plain—mad 'cos—he—hearn—me  
 tell—on—ye an'—ah—wanted—ye t'—git—mad—  
 too—so's—ye'd—*kill*—him—an' then—then—ye  
 wouldn'—hev—t' go—t' th'—pen'tent'ry. Ah wuz  
 —sorry—but—ah—didn'—dass—tell—ye, an' ah  
 reckon—ah's—got—whut—ah—oughter—oughter—  
 now."

The hard lines of the mother's face relaxed. She had seen many violent deaths in her long years, but this one seemed different. Cobe, his great arms holding the girl, shook with sobs.

"Don'—take—on—so—Cobe. Think—on't—when—ah'm gone—putty—soon—thet—ah—never—loved—nobo-dy but ye, an' thet—Char-lie—wuz—always—kyind—an'—good ter—me." A long pause.

"When ah'm—daid—ye—kin—take—take—his—finger—out'n—th' hole, an' take—keer—o'—Char-lie—fur mah saik?" He nodded. "Ah—reckon—thet's—all; tell—mah—love—t' mammy an' daddy, an'—an'—an'——" A deep sigh passed her lips. Her hair fell in waves over his long arms as the delicate head dropped.

He stared, at first unbelieving.

She's—*daid*, ma! Lindy's—*daid*!"

He who had killed often and had been wounded many times was numbed when death, grimly personified, took shape in the one he loved best of all the world.

Slowly he raised his face to the day. There was unspeakable agony in his eyes.

"Ma, kin ye say anythin' laik a prayer?"

They knelt beside the body, and as mumbled words came from the old woman's lips a burst of

sunshine penetrated from beyond the great fleecy clouds, and just one of its shafts fell on the brown hair, tinting it golden—causing the white forehead to be as marble in contrast.

The noise of laughing waters from the creek rose quietly, and the cheerful whistle of bobolink, the metallic call of the crested woodpecker, the warble of thrushes—all astir in the morning freshness—seemed a bitter mockery to the sadness within the four log walls.

He stood up.

"Ah reckon ah'd best go yonder t' th' Lees' an'—an' tell 'em, ma?"

With a woman's instinct, rough mother that she was, she realised the ordeal before him, and she patted his big hands, a thing that she had not done in years. "An' whut 'bout him?"

"She"—he stopped, blinking hard—"she said ter take keer on him; do it."

He was gone, striding up the red-clay road, head bent forward, broad shoulders sagging.

Having laid the girl's body on the rough bed, folded its hands, and carefully brushed the long hair, the mother turned to Wagstaff. She bathed and rubbed until he opened his eyes and sat up weakly.

"Where is Cobe?"

"Gone t' Lee's," she answered abruptly. "Have coffee?"

"My heavens! Mrs Nelson, you——"

"Don' Missus Nelson *me!* Ye've brought 'nough miser'bleness ter we-uns, but she said——"

"*She?* Who is *she?*" Wagstaff struggled to his feet.

"*She?* Ha-ha-ha!" the old voice split in crazy laughter. "Why, *she* ain't nawthin' now, but she *was* Lindy Lee!"

"*Was*—was Linda?" He put both hands to his head. "Then my dream that Linda was shot and that I——"

"Look at you-all's finger!" she grunted.

The stain had dried fast. He staggered into the open air.

"It's true, then; my God! it's *true*! And I thought it a dream!"

Mutely he sat in the growing sunlight until Cobe returned with Linda's mammy and daddy.

Sorrowfully they took their dead away in the big schooner. Even the grey mules seemed to know, and flopped their ears forlornly as they started for home and the little church far across the mountains.

When they had vanished, and the creaking of the wheels had finally died away, Cobe looked at Wagstaff for the first time.

"Does you-all want ter hev th' worm, an' see th' still, an' take me erlong, now? 'Cos ah'm raidy if you-all be."

The other did not answer.

Cobe took his arm gently, and led him to the doorway.

"See thar, man, whar her littl' feet hev crossed many th' time a-comin' t' see me, an' whar mine hev crossed winter an' summer fer twenty-eight yearn—mos' th' time a-goin' t' see her. Why, th' *trees* knowed Lindy, an' all th' birds w'd come when she called 'em—laik this." He chirped.

Tiny inhabitants of the pinelands clustered,

coming from heights and bushes, from upland and from the valleys, as far as they could hear him.

"They thinks it's her; she l'arned me how t' call 'em. An' now," he said hoarsely, "it's done with! Ah ain't got nawthin' moh-ter live fer. Ah'll go with you-all, fer ah'd jest soon be daid 's livin'. An' t' think that *ah* did it! Ah thet kissed th' leaves thet tetch'd her putty littl' dresses, thet saved the stones outen th' crick 'cos she had put her foot on 'em jest onct, an'——" He stopped suddenly, looking up into the blue vault of the skies where clouds drifted and drifted. "When 'll you-all be raidy?"

Wagstaff leaned forward, took Nelson's hand.

"Cobe, *I* have been the cause of all this misery; unwittingly enough, God knows. I don't want you or your still, and I never want to see these mountains again. I'm strong enough now, and I'll go." He turned.

The moonshiner caught his wrist.

"Furgive we-uns, Charlie," he said huskily. "You-all jest did yer dooty, an'"—furtively wiping the tears from his eyes—"this hyah's been our home fur gen'rations, but ma an' me, we-all 'll leave ter-morrer, sun-up. Ah's got a uncle in Kaintuck', an' ah reckon ah cain't b'ar it here nohow, neither."

With few words Wagstaff mounted his horse and disappeared among the trees toward civilisation, the mountaineer waving him a last good-bye.

The next day, all their belongings on the schooner and a rude wagon, Cobe, his old mother, the few chickens, the one pig, and two turkeys bade farewell to the home of the "Nelsons," famed of many years, and at noon took the red-clay road to the west'ard,

while the faint thin smoke of a dying fire curled in wavy plumes from the chimney and the birds gathered up the last crumbs.

The outfit passed slowly from sight.

Lonesome Valley remained, but Cobe was gone.

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